This Month:

ROBERT HERRICK is one of the founders of the tradition of realism in American literature. Starting his literary career in the muckraking era, he has written a series of novels dealing with the American scene. He was recently the subject of a critical study by Newton Arvin, published in the *New Republic.*

MATTHEW JOSEPHSON is the author of *Portrait of the Artist as American, The Robber Barons,* and other books.

KENNETH BURKE, who writes both fiction and criticism, is the author of *Toward a Better Life, Counter-Statement, Permanence and Change,* and other volumes. He is now working on a book dealing with attitudes toward history.

WILLIAM TROY has written critical reviews and articles for the *Nation,* the *Symposium,* and other periodicals. He teaches at Bennington College, Vermont.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS's collected poems are soon to be published by the Alcestis Press.

KENNETH WHITE has contributed poetry and criticism to the *Hound & Horn, Pagany, New Republic,* and other magazines. He is at present working on a series of one-act plays.

HAROLD A. BONER has studied at Colorado University and Columbia. Subsequently he taught for four years at the University of Richmond, Virginia. He has published poetry in the *New Republic* and *Poetry: a Magazine of Verse,* and received *Poetry's* Guarantor's Prize in 1929 and Columbia University's van Rensselaer Prize in 1930.

EDWARD J. FITZGERALD has published in the *American Mercury, Nation,* and *Harpers.* At present he is working with the "Theatre Collective" in New York City and "alternating between excitement over the potentialities" of the left theatre and left poetry. He is twenty-four years old.

HECTOR RELLA lives in Telluride, Colorado. He has contributed poetry to *Dynamo* and other periodicals.

RUTH KRONMAN is twenty-three years old, and lives in New York City. *The People's Choice* is her first published story.

ALFRED MORANG has published stories in almost every little magazine in the country. He lives in Portland, Maine.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS has published critical articles and reviews in the *New Masses, Dynamo, Symposium,* and other magazines.

PHILIP RAHV has contributed literary criticism to previous issues of *Partisan Review, New Masses, International Literature, The Little Magazine,* and other publications.

RICHARD WRIGHT is a young Chicago poet. He has contributed to most of the revolutionary magazines, and we hear that a first novel is in the offing.

In the May Issue:

A NEW COURSE, a short story by *John Herrmann.*

A TEAMSTER'S PAYDAY, a chapter from a new novel by *James T. Farrell.*

MAY DAYS, a short story by *Saul Levitt.*

A Review of C. Day Lewis's A TIME TO DANCE by *Horace Gregory.*

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Partisan Review & Anvil

APRIL
1936

What Is Americanism?

A SYMPOSIUM ON MARXISM AND THE AMERICAN TRADITION

In the belief that the problem of defining Americanism in relation to Marxism and revolutionary literature is of the greatest importance for the understanding of all these forces, the editors have asked a number of writers of diverse shades of opinion to reply to a questionnaire on the subject. They were asked to shape their replies in essay form, and it was suggested that a discussion on and around the questions, rather than direct answers, would be preferred. In forthcoming issues the discussion will be continued, though not in symposium form. The questionnaire follows:

"What is your conception of Americanism? Do you think of it as separate and opposed to the cultural tradition of Western Europe? Do you think of it as identical with, or opposed to, or inclusive of the distinct native revolutionary heritage of the early Jacobins like Tom Paine, the populist movements of later days and the radicalism of the Knights of Labor, Albert Parsons, Gene Debs, Bill Haywood, etc.? Should the values of this American tradition be continued and defended or do they symbolize the brutal struggle for individual riches which some writers (as, for example, certain expatriates and European critics like Georges Duhamel) have interpreted as the essence of Americanism? Does your conception of Americanism postulate its continuity from colonial days to the present age or do you place it within definite historical limits?

"In your opinion, what is the relationship between the American tradition and Marxism as an ideological force in the United States, with particular reference to the growth of revolutionary literature in this country? Do you think that our revolutionary literature reflects and integrates the American spirit or is it in conflict with it? If this conflict exists, do you think this is a failure on the part of revolutionary writers or do the very premises of revolutionary writing prevent the organic integration of the two?"

THEODORE DREISER

AMERICANISM, as I see it, is an illusion of national individuality, held by the great mass of our people in more or less emotional form, through which ideas of reform, of government, of social systems, of art, etc., can be focussed; essentially, it is the emotional, intangible, and often unconscious frame of reference with which most Americans compare whatever ideas they have or come into contact with. Americanism involves the associated illusions of such words as: individualism, the land of the free and the home of the brave, liberty, self-made man, pioneers, this is the best country in the world and you ought to be proud you were born here, the stars and stripes, etc. As I think of it, it is these deeply rooted, powerful associations, close to the very essence of feeling, and as such a positive force. It grew out of the cultural conditions of Western Europe, and is opposed to it in the same way that an acorn is opposed to an oak.

Because I think of it this way, I am inclined to believe that in questions and problems of bringing about a social revolution, the most practical thing is to enlist this feeling, if possible, in the cause of reform and revolution. As I see it, the reforms and revolutions, the changes from capitalism to socialism and communism, are inevitable and inherent in the very nature of things; and if identifying these changes with this powerful emotional force of Americanism will make these changes and processes of adjustment easier for the great mass of people, and correspondingly easier to bring about, then surely the American radical movement should make itself as far as possible free of European associations, and as American as possible in terminology, leadership, and general form. If this American tradition is said to be only a symbolization of the brutal struggle to obtain individual riches—what then? Communism itself is best defended on the very same grounds. Individual riches is nothing but a relative illusion.

Although it is certainly clear that American cultural traditions have very obvious Western European roots, and that there has never been any change of importance here in America that was not preceded by a change of the same kind in Europe, it is a part of Americanism to resent any present influence and connection with Europe. And it is for just this reason that Marxian ideology would do

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well to fit itself to such an adaptable form—our revolutionary tradition—even if it has to lose its own identity.

As for revolutionary literature in this country, I think it is sadly lacking in anything comprehensive enough to suggest the combination of a present-day social revolution with a large and broad view of Americanism in art forms, which would have the widest effect and most powerful appeal. I object to the absolutist reform type in writers, as this characteristic is limiting to the artist and antagonizing to the reader. Revolutionary writing certainly might well include a favorable view of, and in fact a synthesis with, Americanism.

NEWTON ARVIN

OF COURSE "Americanism" is an abstraction and may legitimately mean many things; but when you grant this, I see no reason for saying that Marxism is more irreconcilable with Americanism than with any other national culture predominantly middle-class in its development. Those who say it is, do so either with interested motives, which are easy to understand, or because they are less well acquainted with American history than they could be. Naturally a socialist culture anywhere will represent a great advance over anything that has preceded it and require many breaks with the past; but all this should, if anything, be less true in America than in many European countries, if only because feudalism never left a real stamp on American society. It is true, too, that the most aggressive and articulate elements in the middle class imposed their values on American culture with a freedom and a thoroughness that they never enjoyed in Europe; and this is why supercilious Europeans can, with a show of reason, identify philistine acquisitiveness with "Americanism"—though of course the philistines have had a lively career throughout Europe, especially in the West.

Even in America, however, they have never carried everything before them, and all the humaner, finer, and more creative energies in the early middle-class movement expressed themselves strongly and beautifully in American history; the tradition, therefore, of enlightened thought and action which was thus begotten, born, and nourished to full growth, is there to be mastered and preserved by those who are capable of understanding and prolonging it. The spirit of this tradition seems to me to be a radically democratic and secular individualism, and, in that confessedly partisan sense, I should say that this spirit is more truly what one means by "Americanism" than any other. Only socialism now promises to make possible a democratic and secular culture in which all individuals may be genuinely free and genuinely human, and far from spelling an abrupt break with the American past, it will to this extent be the only conceivable realization of it.

Even more specifically than this, there is a perfectly real line in native American thought, the work of as true Yankees as ever existed, that moves on toward Marxist socialism as toward its culmination. The old democratic radicals—Paine, Samuel Adams, Freneau, and their like—had envisaged an individualistic, but quite classless, republican society; and when their natural successors, in the thirties and forties, came more and more to see that economic individualism was rapidly driving the country toward the class arrangements of contemporary England and France, with the evil results already apparent in those countries, they applied themselves to the social problem thus impending and, taking their deep equalitarian sentiments as a point of departure, made sketches toward a social philosophy in which full-fledged socialism is already germinant. Men like Thomas Skidmore, Albert Brisbane, Orestes Brownson, George Ripley, W. H. Channing, Parke Godwin, and J. H. Noyes may have owed much to Owen or to Fourier; but they gave as good as they got, and their writings are as richly local and relevant, for the most part, as anything in American literature.

On the surface, this movement of thought was confused and interrupted by the all-absorbing Anti-Slavery agitation and the Civil War; and when it reappeared later in the century, its continuity was evident to almost no one. That below the surface the continuity was perfectly real, however, is indicated to all but the hopelessly biased by such tokens as Wendell Phillips's immediate plunge into the political labor movement, or Henry Adams's remark that "by rights, he [himself] should have been also a Marxist," or the activities of the former Abolitionist, John Swinton, or the books of Edward Bellamy, or the naturalness with which Howells (an old-fashioned American if there ever was one) rather promptly—once he got started—adopted a utopian socialism as his creed.

All this of course is on but one level, and the whole story can only be told by taking in many other things: the general tone and color of American literature and non-political thought, for example, and (too largely removed from this) the actual struggles of American farmers, artisans, mechanics, miners, and industrial workers from the last days of the eighteenth century on. When one puts oneself in mind of these things, one feels something like an atavistic horror, as at some shameless blasphemy, of the vicious fools who use the name "American" to signify all that is regressive and corrupt.

As for the younger American writers of proletarian fiction, poetry, drama, and criticism, they are the present representatives, not of some absolute and mythical "Americanism," but of what is best and strongest in our inherited national culture, and it is they who are both sustaining and enriching it.

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This they seem bound to do, whatever happens; if anything on this plane is still to be desired, it is that more of them should do it in a clear and conscious manner: in such a manner as to suggest that our Yankee culture is not a word in a book to them, but a profoundly personal, imaginative, emotional reality. For this it is wholly unnecessary—does it need to be said?—that their own racial or national memories should be natively American; as unnecessary as that Lucian should have been a native of Athens or Seneca a native of Italy. To the former, Greek culture, and to the latter, Roman culture, were far more living things than to many Athenians or many Italians of their time; and the best Americans are, as often as not, the Syrians or the Spaniards, so to say, of this age and place. A seedy cosmopolitanism, however—the antithesis of true internationalism—and a careless incuriosity about the American past have hung over from the Age of Eliot; and like the Bohemianism of the Age of Mencken, have not yet quite ceased to infect the minds even of proletarian writers, both some of old native stock and some whose "Americanization" is more recent. Just so long as this is true, their writing will be either thin and poor or, at the best, less full-fleshed, less robust, and less rich in harmonies than its own seriousness and distinction entitle it to be.

The tide, it is only just to add, seems to have set unmistakably the other way, and some of the most intensively localized and "nativized" books of the last two or three years have been the work of left-wing writers. To those who had given the whole subject any thought, there was not only nothing surprising in this, but it was the thing that was certain to happen. It was always true that when American writers thought radically they became, not less but more—and more significantly—American.

JOSEPHINE HERBST

IF THE term "Americanism" means anything, it must be in the interpretation that masses of American people have given it, the free and equal right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That this conception has been a dream rather than a reality does not change its validity for purposes of discussion. Anyone speaking of Americanism may speak from the limitation of his prejudices and interests. Ford may say in the *Saturday Evening Post* that "Americans want to be secure in opportunity." Whose opportunity and for what? The workers shot down at Ford's wanted to be secure also. Certain events become in time accepted by all as "American." Lincoln and his shovel are sacrosanct, but in his lifetime Stephen A. Douglas was the more respected man. "The rabble of disorderly farmers" fighting Shays's Rebellion become with time brave fellows struggling against tyrannous taxes. John Brown was a horse thief alive; now his soul goes marching on. Farmers holding Sears-Roebuck sales today to outwit a mortgage foreclosure are subversive reds to the New York Insurance Company owners, but to fellow farmers they are sober men standing up for their natural born rights. Americanism from its conception has always been open to many interpretations, and yet it has been an article of faith. The country was opened, developed, and exploited on the belief of the American people in equal opportunity. This drive for life laid waste as much as it created. A world quite different from any that most men would want rose on the slogan of "opportunity for all."

I have lived in many parts of this country. My family provided me with an extensive laboratory record of American life. The first of my people had a grant of land from William Penn long before the American Revolution. The family were inveterate letter-writers and diary-keepers. They left a fine chain of written evidence. They branched out and followed every opportunity. From big landowners they became little landowners; then landless. They risked life to get into Deadwood when gold was struck, went into the South with the carpetbaggers after the Civil War. Some fought in the Revolution, some were Quakers and hid in the hay. Some pioneered in Wisconsin, and some went insane. Many children never grew up. Many grew up to work on railroads and get typhoid. Some surveyed for the Government through the Rockies and wandered down into Oregon. One got rich. With time and events their attitude toward certain things changed; the deep religious note vanished. The duty toward political life before the Civil War turned to cynicism and get-what-you-can after the war. Darwin was discussed, the Haymarket murders put a mark on them all. When the big railroad strikes of the 1880's came, this family was also scorched. Later days were to show the influence on those who went to the Middle West of the populist movement and the I.W.W. Popular songs alone do not sink into the consciousness of a people; martyrs have a way of living long. The conception of the family duty changed with time. Distances helped widen breaches. Science became a substitute for religion, for some. But the expectation that all of them had of America was fairly uniform. They were not eaten by greed for wealth. Only in the last two decades has a change come into the form of belief. A young niece writing to me from Iowa wants to escape, not to "make a fortune" as my uncle prospecting in the Black Hills did, but "to live." She doesn't mean money by living, she means rich experience. She is only sixteen years old, but the urgency of this letter is as unmistakable as a letter written by an uncle in the eighties from an academy in Philadelphia, wailing that he had to leave this stupid town and go

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west where there was a chance to make a fortune or he would die. The East was "too small" for him. There are no more frontiers; my niece wants to come to New York. The mobility that was peculiarly American has shifted gears, that is all. Jobless youth still wanders the face of the country but remains jobless. Families are footloose but hungry. Farmer-owners do not become owners of new farms, but tenants shifting uneasily year after year. Six hundred sober Vermont marble workers out for months on strike show pay checks held as evidence, twenty cents for a week's work. Such checks taunt them. They ask, can men buy homes on twenty cents? Yet politicians continue to speak of America as a country of home-owners. Even in the days when men talked breezily of fortunes, their actual desires were peculiarly simple and pure. They wanted "good times," education for their children, nice homes, and, as cars and mechanical contrivances multiplied, they wanted these also. But to speak of the "brutal struggle for individual riches" seems to me a warped notion. Brutal struggle there has been; a definite historical development was relentlessly unrolling, but so far as masses of people are concerned, greed did not rust them. Certain elements cannot be isolated and judged as general. As well say that Mrs. McLean and her Hope diamond are American, and Ella Reeve Bloor is not. I recognize Ella Reeve Bloor in one glance to be as authentically American as the covered wagon, but unfortunately I also recognize Mrs. McLean. Angelo Herndon and Morgan both are American. The field of cotton carries the boll weevil. The whole struggle of mankind is to throw off the parasite; of science, to kill the germ and let the vital organism live. The Morgans of the world played a part in a development which laid waste as much as it built; now they are gumming up the machinery. The machinery is here to be used, the country to be used. The quarrel is one over use-values. The term "Americanism" has a bad odor at present, as it is popularly used to indicate something not fascist or communist, we are told, but American. It has therefore become an evasive, reactionary term, divorced from its original usage, which had value as indicating a dream wish. This dream wish is as vital as ever, but it is not peculiarly American. The farmers of mixed Haitian, Jamaican, and Cuban blood in Realengo 18 in Cuba were so close in their desires and problems to the American farmer of the Middle West that I lived in their palm leaf huts, slept in their beds filled with the sweet-smelling *veliver,* talked with them about the same basic things that I talked about with farmers in Iowa or Dakota. The tragedy of the triumph of Hitler in Germany is that masses of people believed in his revolutionary slogans. Those German masses today still believe in those slogans. They are not interested in cutting off ears and noses. They want to live, to educate their children, to have dignity of human life.

I do not want to oversimplify this problem, to make it appear as too directly responsive to economic forces alone. In fact, the longer one examines the questionnaire the more difficult it is to find simple answers. I cannot see Americanism cut into pieces and ending at any given point. The country has developed in a steady, onward rush. If I may isolate one family for experiment I am able to see how continuous the line is, how important the past is for an understanding of the present. Without question I would carry that past beyond the American shores to Europe. The early settlers brought heritages and beginnings that are with us yet. On the cultural side, that heritage haunted us for a long time. What we sometimes mean by Americanism are the rich qualities of geography and condition that are national but not basic for the understanding of human life. The buffalo grass has been ripped up on our prairies, dust storms threaten as the oncoming desert breeds grass-hoppers and hunger, but man still seeks a home. The exaggerated richness of the early country led to exaggerated hope. That very attribute will provide a national form for whatever move Americanism may take, but I cannot see the future of America if it continues to retain hope as divorced from Marxism. It is a simple question of use-value, and that a people building on confidence of their powers will finally use those powers for themselves in the only way that can guarantee them "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," is in my opinion the final way. The seed was planted here long ago; it will grow for a time, then need new soil. But what human beings want is fuller life. Arguments about "human nature" are nearly always grim. Whose human nature? Iowa farmers on strike on the roads in 1932 were showing the same human nature that we saw in 1776, yet pessimists always argue that human nature withers the world. It is to them a tight, grasping fist waiting to clutch the penny. Just as often, it is the open hand. The reflection of all these complicated forces, with an understanding of their direction, should be the business of revolutionary literature. A story may be confined to a simple incident and yet do this thing. What revolutionary literature we may be said to have is only beginning. It springs out of the literature of the past at its best. I see no conflict between a truly revolutionary literature and what I have termed "Americanism." Our revolutionary literature has been too confined in its beginnings to isolated substances. It seems to me, the pattern is too tight. All of the qualities that we term "American" are rich and useful—the marvelous idiom, the variegated pattern of events almost overpowering in their diversity. America to me is a country that has never fulfilled itself; it will only do so through the processes of revolution. I am no prophet. I do not know how or when. I do know why. My grandfather went to the legislature from Pennsylvania as a Democrat. My father

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never voted anything except the Republican ticket. In 1924 my mother and two older sisters bolted and voted for La Follette. The men voted Republican. I was a cynic about the usefulness of the ballot until 1932, and in that year with fifteen farmer neighbors in Pennsylvania I cast a ballot in a little hotel on the Delaware river that was standing when Washington crossed the ice ten miles below, for a straight Communist ticket.

ROBERT HERRICK

FOR over a year as Government Secretary for the Virgin Islands, I have had an experience of administration in a small community, removed from the larger currents of life in the continental United States, which has left me little opportunity—or inclination—to speculate on the theoretical problems raised in your questionnaire. An intimate and constant acquaintance with the complex process of government, even in such a small sphere as this one, has unconsciously affected my preconceptions of possibilities in social experimentation. I have found government a more baffling and uncertain affair than what it had seemed to be from the outside, at a distance; and intimate contact with a society of human beings in the process of being governed has modified my previous ardor for rapid and spectacular transformations in the process. Under responsibility one becomes pragmatic, suspicious of theory. The one safe refuge is to ignore all catchwords and categories, such as "proletarian," "Marxian," "fascist," "liberal," etc., etc., which are open to as many interpretations as there are temperaments, to cling to the world of fact where none of these terms exist in pure essence, and attempt to solve each problem thrown at the administrator *ad hoc*. . . .

For all the years of my conscious life I have believed in what used to be called, fondly if rather vaguely, "the American tradition" (or in the vernacular, "Americanism"); that is, a cultural base differing from that of all other peoples, due to the physical environment, racial inheritances, and historical development of the American people. This tradition was best exemplified in the words of Emerson, of Whitman, of Mark Twain, and less completely of many other writers. Also in the careers of many "typical" Americans, from Franklin, Jefferson, Lincoln to Cleveland; from Edison to Ford, from Barnum to Rockefeller, etc. The determining characteristic of this Americanism was an exaggerated emphasis on the values of individuality, independence, self-assurance, adventurous experimentation. These admirable qualities, unfortunately, encouraged the predatory development of American character quite as powerfully as more attractive spiritual aspects—as is becoming disastrously evident with every turn of the economic wheel. Reckless, ruthless, materialistic, or idealistic and self-sufficient, one felt that any "American" of any social class was a quite different entity from any Western European, sometimes to his advantage and often not. I do not feel today that this vigorous American tradition has survived the shock of the World War and its economic convulsions, and the still greater shock of bewildered disillusionment at the partial collapse of the economic structure—at any rate, it is for the present submerged. It is each day becoming more doubtful whether American character can retrieve those fine qualities which once were associated with the American tradition. A deterioration of fibre due to the relentless pressures of machine civilization plus an incessant and ingenious exploitation of economic advantage by those in privileged positions, an increasing disregard of all values but the money one, have obviously undermined the entire structure of our older society. How long the foundations will stand the stresses and strains, whether months or a few years, is a matter of individual speculation. If American civilization survives, without taking either extreme of left or right—if it can regain its old median course which released the energies of the individual while trying to restrain his predatory lusts (often unavailingly, alas!)—the enduring and intrinsic value of "the American tradition" will have been demonstrated. That tradition is now in the crucible. The world awaits the outcome.

I do not consider that literature can or should be all of one impulse, either "proletarian" or "authoritarian." The novels dealing with social conditions in the United States that I have read recently are quite as mixed in their implications as the more conventional literature of an earlier period when I myself began to write. (But, fortunately, they are written by persons with a real knowledge of the life they attempt to present, as was often not the case with older writers!) They contain elements suggestive of a new social order and other elements obviously derived from the older tradition. Nor would it be desirable, either, for the literature or the social future of the United States that our imaginative writers should be all of one kind or should devote their talents to proselytising for one social pattern or another. The more distinctively "Marxian" our literature becomes the less actual and distinguished it will be as literature. This simple fact seems to be recognized today by the younger Russians, who have learned that literature cannot be created entirely out of social theory or be entirely expressive of any theory and remain literature. The less consciously our writers endeavor to mould their work in formulas of any kind, and the more they stick to their proper task, which is representation and interpretation, not propaganda, the better chance they

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will have to survive. We need more understanding, less conviction.

Personally, when I allow myself to speculate on what lies beyond the mists of the present, I hope for something neither fascist nor Marxian in ideal. I realize that these terms are vaguely inaccurate, that both cover a great variety of human intentions, yet everybody understands that fascism means the authoritative control by a few wills of the form and substance of social and political life, while Marxian implies the orderly organization of all human elements in a common effort for the material and cultural evolution of the mass; the one trusts blindly to ferocious individualism, the other to cooperative effort, "the greatest good of the greatest number." Both ideals were present in the older American tradition. Quite possibly the solution lies in preserving, not one but both ideals in the same structure!

Fascism, benevolent or brutal, has been tried many times in the history of the world and has invariably resulted after a period in social detonations. I am convinced it will again, whether in Italy, or Germany, or the United States. No one dictator (and his followers) has ever been wise enough or strong enough to play the role of destiny for humanity, for long. The Marxian formula has never, not even in Russia, been pressed to its full, logical conclusions. Can it be? That is what the world is curiously waiting to see. My fear for the Russian experiment is that it may, under the pressure of success, become too soon set in its mould, rather than plastic and evolutionary. Its accomplishment, materially, to date has been the most valuable and spectacular outcome of the World War—and the greatest lesson on the large scale in what human society can accomplish in self-direction when energized by determined wills. Yet that accomplishment, miraculous as it is, if transferred literally and methodically to another environment, such as ours, would result in something too monstrous to be endured. In other words cultural conditions determine desirable lines of development rather than abstract theory. Russia needs a mechanical, industrial organization, a materialistic drive; while the United States is cursed with too exclusive mechanization. It would be a catastrophe for us in the United States were we to press the industrial pace of the past forty years; we should quickly become a nation of robots with the robot mentality. Our hope would seem to lie in a society with more varied incentives and a more fluid distribution of the products of our national ingenuity and industry. What will achieve for us such a desirable balance between mind and matter can not be foretold with any precision: we shall have to wait and see. With no great enthusiasm for either a Marxian or a fascist solution I cling to my early faith in the American tradition, in the so-called democratic process. If our segment of humanity, with all its inherited advantages, cannot find its way between the Scylla of fascism and the Charybdis of communism, another human society will, in time. One does not vote oneself, still less one's neighbor, into paradise, nor does one at any time know where precisely paradise may lie.

The evolutionary process still operates, and it is naive to take one's own efforts to alter it too seriously.

MATTHEW JOSEPHSON

To the Editors:

I hadn't at all meant to be rude about the symposium on Marxism and Americanism. I was going to send in my few brief words. But having been seriously ill nearly all of February, I have just got up out of bed and begun slowly to pick up where I left off a month ago.

It must be too late now to put in my two cents. In any case I would not have been able to write a dissertation, nor would I have wished to. You have formulated the question very well, and I was glad indeed to see it brought up in this form. It is all perfectly simple to my mind: to introduce into and pervade our society with the imperatives of Marxism, we will have to adapt them most thoroughly to our American environment, our physical and moral climate, and our historical traditions. This is what Marx and Engels clearly tell us to do, and this is what the magnificent Bolsheviks did in Russia. This is what is happening in Spain, etc., etc.

Marxism is a definite concept; but "Americanism" —Heaven preserve us—is any man's battle. M. Duhamel is a fool, and Bill Haywood, who was certainly not one, gripped only one side of America (as it really is). The nearest to a crystallized presentation of the original American idea or millenium is defined in Beard's *Economic Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy*—the free (petty bourgeois) citizen's Republic of *ca.* 1836 at its highest development toward egalitarianism. Corey in the first part of his *Crisis of the Middle Class* also shrewdly, realistically defines this social order, following Parrington. We cannot return to that order, though the pieces of its ideology still function, now treacherously, or now embraced by some faction with sincerity. Against these outworn and abused democratic ideas and institutions (yet living cunningly within their "sheep's clothing," the wolf of capital) stand the absolutes of the present capitalist system. Those who hope for a new America, a just social order must, with their advanced sociological concepts, act as *solvents* of the old traditions and the present massive forms and interests of oppression and exploitation —act in such wise that the majority of the people

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can grasp at length their message. The majority, I say, must be reached rather than a few small outposts and clusters of those who are convinced and in transport.

We have not failed; we have committed many terrible errors, lost much time, learned lessons, but made small beginnings. The cultural preparation must, after all, precede the era of true, swift revolutionary change (*cf. Eighteenth Brumaire*). It had "lagged" in America. Now in hundreds of dissenters' books, poems, polemics, histories, novels, biographies, it goes forward steadily.

Yours, MATTHEW JOSEPHSON

KENNETH BURKE

WHAT Is Americanism? There is Americanism only in this sense: there was some loss of tradition, due to reshuffling, and to the fact that such reshuffling tended to weaken the particular forms of bureaucratization by which traditions were kept most fully alive. In particular, the remnants of what is called in the *Communist Manifesto* "feudal socialism" were weakened by the shuffle. Result: the almost perfect milieu for the full flowering of bourgeois-capitalist thought, in all its rigorousness. Such "perfection" was further aided by the almost total annihilation of the Indians (as distinct from the countries of Latin America, that tended somewhat to incorporate Indian ingredients in their cultural amalgam). Process further completed in bourgeois style by the "liberation" of the Negro, thereby effectively obliterating the modes of thought by which some elements of feudal socialism might have been intensified. By such "liberation" within capitalist terms, feudal slavery became that glorious humanitarian thing, "wage slavery," and the bourgeois-capitalist perspective was made complete. There was nothing left to do but go in for a series of real estate booms. (And I sometimes stop to recall with grimness how close Whitman's yea-saying came to Rotarianism.)

What, then, might be called "American"? Not any particular cultural trend that is not found in Europe—but the *degree of excess* by which it is exemplified. Correspondingly, as the expression of bourgeois philosophy, by lack of impediments, reached the maximum intensity, so may the movements antithetical to this be expected to reach maximum intensity. Thus we find significant trends in Europe anticipated here and expressed with greater zealousness. (Poe in letters—Peirce in philosophy—Ives in music.)

On the other hand, remember the great smear of uniformity that was spread across the continent through the abstractions of finance capitalism. An approach to a piece of land via the abstractions of "profit" tends to override differences, to put all sorts of "investment opportunities" in the same bin. The concrete differences of geography, climate, and the like lose their maximum power as producers of distinct cultural developments—the abstractions of profit bring them into one "happy" family. It is this tendency, I think, that provides material economic support for the cult of unity, and makes for some sincerity in the bourgeois anguish at the thought of civil war (an anguish not based merely upon the fear of war itself, since this same group can be bellicose enough when issues are presented on a nationalistic basis).

The tendency to see as the particular essence of Americanism "the brutal struggle for individual riches" gives me a pain in the pain-receiver. Americans are no greedier than anyone else. The terribleness of the situation is, not that we are exceptionally greedy, but that the opportunities for the expression of greed on the part of some have reached a maximum state of organization. In other words, the situation as I see it is this: We are highly organized—and such social organization amounts to an amplifying device. Precisely the same amount of greed that a poet might exert in trying to acquire a good set of rhymes, would in the case of a Morgan partner bring in millions of dollars, because of this man's strategic hold on the amplifying organization.

As a matter of fact, very few of our worst offenders have been monsters. (There have been many more monsters, proportionately, in the arts, owing to the added responsibilities of the antithetical attitude, the tendency towards "warping" that goes with the cult of refusal). Many of our successful business overlords were almost tearful in their love of mankind. Nothing surprising in that. They could afford to be. Particularly their wives.

"Americanism" as a protest movement (the literature of criticism that rose, with varying degrees of accuracy and vagueness, in antithesis to the rise of capitalism), is simply part of the romantic movement in general. As such, you'll find it in Europe quite as you find it here—and you will find it developing in the East in proportion as bourgeois "progress" makes itself felt.

Here is a "lead" that I think might have some possibilities. Consider the romantic antithesis by using the metaphor of monasticism. In proportion as the bourgeois emphasis upon the secular developed, the feudalistic way of exemplifying the "two-worlds" principle lost prestige. Result: the rise of romanticism, which can be analyzed as a kind of *secular* monasticism. What was the "two-worlds" principle in the earlier religious frame? An island in the sea. "Colony-thinking," quite as you find it developing in nineteenth-century romanticism, in such ventures as

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Brook Farm and the Oneida Colony. And in the cliques of estheticism. Attempt to avoid the unsavoriness of extreme competitiveness (as the golden "*right* to sell one's services" was transformed, by inverse alchemy, into the dross of a "*need* to have one's services sold"). The attempt manifested itself with varying degrees of thoroughness in the attempt to create an *imperium in imperio,* a society-within-a-society, an island (often communistically inclined) in the sea of capitalism. Such an approach gives one further insight into the lure of the EPIC plan, which proposes to establish an island of "self-service" in the sea of capitalist markets.

Communist job: to make clear why the *imperium in imperio* method cannot work. To make clear why you can only make a good island by changing the whole damned sea. And I don't see any obstacles to making that thesis the core of one's "integration."

The main obstacle I see lies in the usual communist's failure to realize how close communism comes to the earlier modes of monasticism. Consequently, one may spend too much effort in attacking what *need* not be attacked, and what *should* not be attacked. One need not attack religious monasticism *per se,* for instance. Give it its dues—and then proceed to show that the fulfilment of the ideal requires communism. Many of the orders were communistic. But in arising out of the Church's wealth (like the Rockefeller charities out of Standard Oil dividends), they were set for disintegration, as the genius of the sea finally submerged the island. The critical terminology was bad, so that the proper admonitions were lacking (hence: their attempt to make up for this lack by moralistic legislation, such as the attempt to legislate against the glandular system—thundering against *symptoms* because one did not have the accurate names for the *causes* of the symptoms). Similarly, the secular monasteries of romanticism usually lacked the right names. Marxism provides much more accurate names. The Marxist critique of capitalism is basic to an understanding of the whole matter. The use of such critique can be as "American" as anything.

In sum: We operate here in America under a system of property relations closely analogous to that of Europe. Owing to disruption of the traditional checks maintained by bureaucratic hangovers from feudalism, we can exemplify the "genius" of this property system most amply. On the other hand, we have so much natural wealth to squander, that there are more crumbs lying about to be picked up by the victims of the system than is the case in Europe. Tributes to "Fordism" as an "American solution" can usually be traced back to this greater natural endowment in crumbs. Hence, the proposal to "solve" our troubles, not by a wiser distribution of wealth, but by such a criminal squandering of our resources, via the fabulous output of gadgets, that there will always be sheets of old tin lying around for someone to self-assertively use in making himself a roof for his hut in Hooverville. The enterprising tendency to use this offal, however, is no more exclusively "American" than is the tendency of peasants in France to glean their fields exclusively "French." And of course, the Ford solution through "scientifically stimulated wastefulness," criminal as it is, is further spoiled as a "remedy" by the fact that bad distribution of profits makes it impossible to waste enough.

If one is victimized in Missouri, it is "American" to defend oneself by the use of whatever helpful materials are available in Missouri. It is "American" to use anything one feels might be of value in remedying one's situation. Be it an old piece of tin, or be it an old piece of philosophy—its relevance to an American situation depends not upon its *origin* but upon its *application.* Inasmuch as our system of property relations came from Europe, it will not be surprising that we could borrow from European critiques of the system. The Marxist critique, in its main outlines, lacks "Americanism" only to the extent that anti-capitalist criticism in general is impeded by the organized opposition (as regards both the deliberate and the "spontaneous" aspects of such organization). One system of meanings tends to close you to another system of meanings. Hence, the avalanche of capitalist meanings tends to bury the structure of anti-capitalist meanings. But there is nothing peculiarly "American" about that. And insofar as capitalism in America proves itself inadequate, a critique of capitalism (whatever the source of the critique) becomes "American" in its relevance.

There is a tendency, at present, to overstress the search for peculiarly "American" phenomena. Thus, in his recent lecture on "Our Revolutionary Heritage," Hicks tried to claim nearly every outstanding American of the past for the cause of revolution. His desire to make us feel good was laudable. But his way of going about it was questionable. He merely noted the attitude of rejection that ran through all nineteenth-century romanticism, and called it revolutionary. Gannett was right in objecting that very much of it was mere rebelliousness. As a matter of fact, an application of Hicks's method to Hearst would have Hearst for the revolution. Particularly during the rise of his journalistic career, Hearst put forth a great deal in the way of negativistic rebelliousness; and he is still doing more kicking against "injustice" than, let us say, Emerson did towards the close of his life.

In turning from humanism to communism, Hicks dropped that humanist word "romanticism" out of his vocabulary, putting the word "revolutionary" in its stead. And by this device he was able simply to reverse the humanist attitude towards romanticism, taking as a *good* what had formerly been a *bad.* But romanticism is not *per se* revolutionary. Much of it is definitely reactionary. All brands of it, to be sure,

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exemplify an attitude of *rejection*. But the test of a revolutionary position is not in *what one rejects*, but in *what one would put in place of the rejected*. Not in the "push away from," but in the particular "pull towards" one selects to match it. Furthermore, by reason of his overly "American" emphasis, he overlooked the feature of these earlier men that could be emphasized with most profit to our purposes: *The fact that many of them so naturally incorporated foreign material in their thinking whenever they found such material serviceable.*

On the other hand, there is only danger in the naive attempts of some to make a build-up for Marx as the omniscient and unerring wizard of prophecy. It will be resisted by "Americans" because it would be resisted by any people. Marx is a *forerunner*, and must be presented as such (as he is presented in the Russian Marx-Lenin combine). Similarly, I consider it a great mistake (a part of the "build-up" procedure) to attempt dismissing every development of scientific thought since Marx by the pronouncing of anathema. There is much of value in modern psychology and in relativistic physics that must be incorporated, regardless of its "bourgeois" origin. Marx himself specifically admitted that he borrowed much from bourgeois sources that came before him. The mere fact that he appeared at one moment of time rather than another cannot serve to prevent the same borrowing from sources that came *after* him. Every once in a while I see, in communist papers, attacks upon one scientist or another that make me wince. The procedure is too much like the Ptolemaic attacks upon Copernicanism. A philosophy proves its value, not by what new material it must *categorically reject*, but by what new material it can *assimilate*. A critic who looks at a new theory, and without ever discussing it on its own terms, solves everything in advance by simply condemning it as "reactionary," is simply being reactionary himself. He may make a hit with the boys, but he has done worse than nothing. The consideration of non-Marxist contributions to thought cannot be done within the simple proprieties of bureaucratic routine. Fortunately, the tendency to do so is dying fast anyhow—much of it was due to mere rawness, and one cannot go on being raw forever. Improvement in this respect is occurring, if only because it would be too hard not to improve.

I might close by one little bit of cynicism. f there is anything that seems peculiarly "American" to me, in the bad sense, it is the resistance to philosophy—the feeling that philosophy is some kind of parlor sport, of no immediate application to our necessities. This is troublesome because capitalism is a philosophy (no less a philosophy through seeming "natural" to the amateur philosophers that give it expression). And similarly, the philosophy of capitalism can only be combated by *another* philosophy. I always use the example of the dust storms in the West. "What?" I murmur. "You say that philosophy doesn't matter? Then just look at those dust storms. They are absolute evidence of the ways in which a bad philosophy can actually have an effect upon the weather. They show how, if you don't get things straight, you may even ruin the climate of a whole continent. A *bad* philosophy can thus endanger vast populations. Whereupon, all the greater need to have a *good* philosophy." Yours for the *good* philosophy, the philosophy of communism.

WALDO FRANK

I RECOGNIZE the "publicity" value of this symposium. The problem is indeed crucial; and it is interesting, doubtless, to learn whether the opinions of certain other men coincide with our own. But there is a danger. In a symposium, where one is limited to a few hundred words, little more than an unsupported opinion can be stated. Such opinions, on myriad subjects, make up what passes for "criticism" —and for "education"—in the United States. The foundations of experience, and of considered analysis and synthesis, are almost wholly lacking, if not in a few books, then in the minds of those who call themselves enlightened readers. And without such foundations the plethora of opinion remains what it has been and is in this country: a gas shifting with outside pressure.

The relationship between American culture and social revolution has been the direct subject of at least five of my books. In *The Rediscovery of America* (1928-9) I intimated the passage and transmutation of what I called "the Great Tradition," from the Mediterranean littoral (Egypt, Judea, Greece, Italy, Spain) via England and France to our shores; in *America Hispana* I followed this tradition to the shores south of our own; and in these and other volumes, I have established a continuity between the deepest intuitive and cultural heritage of Western man and social revolution. Thus far, in my recent writings, I have only fragmentarily touched on the specific Marxist action by which this Great Tradition must be, not fulfilled, but kept alive *here and now*. I have not yet given my conclusion a definitive critical form. Yet it should be obvious that I can say nothing respectable without first re-stating the premises as they exist in my books—an impossible task within the bounds of a symposium.

This must go in lieu of a reply. I will add only this: The necessary continuity between that Great Tradition, of which American culture *must be* a permutation, and social revolution in Marxist terms, is the truth—is today's dominant truth. But in order to establish this continuity all the terms must be reinterpreted with far more sagacity and depth than

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is current in our so-called "intellectual" life. Shallow men have, for the time, in the United States, preempted these rich concepts. The meanings of the Great Tradition, of culture, of American culture, Marxism—and above all, of Man—have been flattened by these men to their own mean dimensions. They have reduced revolutionary and cultural criticism to a sort of solipsistic and onanistic activity which, of course, affects no one but themselves.

WILLIAM TROY

THE main assumption behind your questionnaire, as I understand it, is that if a reconciliation between Marxism and Americanism could somehow be effected the whole problem of our culture would immediately be solved. You begin quite rightly, in my opinion, by asking for a definition of what is called Americanism; but in this initial effort, I am afraid, you are going to encounter certain disappointment. The difficulty is that Americanism is one of those terms which are at once too simple and too complicated to define with satisfaction. It would perhaps be wiser to recognize at the outset that it corresponds not so much to a clean-cut intellectual notion as to a set of emotional attitudes. Undoubtedly these attitudes themselves are traceable to an anterior set of ideas— religious, political and socio-economic. Thus the well-known "self-reliance" of the American character, celebrated by Americans in other respects as distinguishable as Emerson and Herbert Hoover, might be traced to the dominant theological implications of the Protestant Reformation. The sentiment of liberty and equality has been convincingly traced, even by conservative historians, to the influence of the eighteenth century political philosophers. And what is the worship of success for its own sake but an attempt to discover a moral value in the application of the laissez-faire theory of business and government to individual living? But the result of tracing the ideological pedigree of the various emotional attitudes in the term Americanism is not definition but dissolution into something that has been common to Western European culture for so many centuries that it has determined not only our language but our very manner of thinking. This something is the Renaissance conviction that the individual is capable of working out his own salvation—spiritual, moral, and economic—without any assistance from the outside. It is because of the vague simplicity of this underlying belief that we have had so many different varieties of Americanism—Jefferson's, Thoreau's, Jim Hill's, Whitman's, Theodore Roosevelt's, and Hearst's brands of Americanism. If you begin with a broad enough notion, like the notion of the sacrosanct individual, there are no limits to the areas in which it may be applied. Self-reliance may express itself in political theory, in transcendental ethics, in business enterprise, in physical action, or in propagandist journalism. Liberty may mean the liberty to ascend the skies or to steal one's neighbor's land, to shoot tigers or to disseminate lies. Such precisely is the kind of notion behind Americanism; and if one notes contradictions among its proponents these are due to differences between the areas of reference. The checks on individual liberty imposed by governments are at best precarious checks; for government itself, as we have learned from history, becomes one of these areas. Moreover, such a notion adjusts itself easily to historical exigencies, and while at one time it may attach itself to the idea of revolution, at another time it may become identified with reaction. It makes a great deal of difference not only *whose* Americanism is in question but at what stage in our history it is being used. For these reasons it seems to me that the term, despite its common emphasis, is too fluid and variable to be used satisfactorily in any discussion.

In the current effort to identify it with Marxism, for example, I believe that we can detect a sophistry which consists in reviving the earlier and forgotten associations of a term in the attempt to confuse it with a later term based on a fundamentally different assumption. Revolution has been associated with Americanism, but revolution is not inherent in the notion of individuality, which is the essential notion behind Americanism. As in all sophistries, something is left out; and what is left out here is some hundred-odd years of history. Unless I have been badly misinformed, Marxism is a revolutionary movement based on the assumption that economic forces and not individual men are responsible for historical change. It stresses the collective as against the individual will. For this reason I am at a loss to understand how a psychology fashioned by the belief that man can lift himself by his own boot-straps can be reversed overnight to one involving, before all else, a profound humility. I consider Naphta's fusion of communism and medieval scholasticism in Mann's *Magic Mountain* a much more plausible sophistry. (It is true that Marxism as a militant revolutionary movement does give scope to the heroic individual will, as the novels of Malraux have demonstrated. But in the ultimate description of his role that it offers the individual, it leaves no place for the moral imagination).

If one does not believe in an autonomous American tradition, except as a convenience for writers of literary histories, there can be no problems connected with "the growth of a revolutionary literature" in this country that are separable from those to be encountered elsewhere in the world at present. In literature, which deals always with the personal, the immediate, and the concrete, there is unques-

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tionably more differentiation than in the realms of abstract thought. But this differentiation in any time tends to be of form and content rather than of ruling ideas. A study of the literature of a remote period, like the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, enables one to realize how uniform everywhere are the main preoccupations of a culture. Just as the important writers of the last generation, the Prousts and Manns and Joyces, despite vast differences in subject matter and technique, managed to reflect an identical negation of modern industrial civilization, the important writers of the future will write out of an attitude that is international in scope. If this attitude turns out to be an affirmation based on the hope of a proletarian revolution, it will not be different in the United States from what it will be in England or France. The differences between the literature of any period are to be measured not in terms of nationality but in terms of the perception, intelligence, and imagination of individual writers.

I could answer your last question at all only by reshaping it into the more general question of the possible integration of Marxism with literature—Marxism by itself with *the* literary tradition. And this is much too complicated a problem to be undertaken in this place. I will merely suggest that since Americanism has been submitted to something like a historical analysis, the same would have to be accorded Marxism, which has also acquired so many attached emotive meanings that its original significance is obscured. Apparently such a spokesman as Waldo Frank is a Marxist in good standing; but it is evident from his address at the Writers' Congress in Paris last year that he has taken from Marxism only those things which appeal to him. By the time that Mr. Frank has regretted Karl Marx's dualism, the socialist reduction of the individual "from an organic integer of cosmos to a mere quantitative factor of the collective mass," and the notion that "life's creative force" is something objective, there is very little left of Marxism but the eagles and the trumpets. It is plain that Mr. Frank is less concerned with economic materialism than with his own peculiar brand of religion. The "organic view of life" can only be realized through revolution; Marxism provides the immediate instrument for this revolution; therefore, Marxism must be embraced by the artist. As a *creative* individual; however, the artist must ignore all elements in the Marxist system which deny him his role—in particular, the objective or mechanistic view of reality.

This is pointed out, not to expose Mr. Frank's private heresies, but to illustrate how difficult it is for the artist who cares anything for his role to achieve a really logical bridge between dogmatic Marxism and literature. Instead of a system of dogma, Marxism becomes a state of mind, and this state of mind is identified rhetorically with a state of mind that is perennial to literature—an intuition of what Mr. Frank calls "the primal unity" of all living matter. That certain logical steps are overlooked in the process is perhaps not very important; for certainly, if Mr. Frank's Marxism is not orthodox, it is more like a Marxism that can appeal to the artist than the Marxism, let us say, of Bukharin. What Mr. Frank's dialectical embarrassment most simply reveals is the profound qualification of Marxist doctrine that is necessary before it can possibly be integrated with the literary tradition.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

THE American cultural tradition appears to me to stem directly from that of Western Europe of four hundred years ago in its most liberal phases. From that point it became a separate thing, or attempted to become so. It failed in large part because of the inability of the men of that day to absorb the new ideology, faced as they were by a life-and-death struggle with their primitive environment and also, of course, the inevitable fallibility of all human flesh—the dishonesty, self-seeking which characterize every phase of crude plenty in the world.

The essential democracy upon which an attempt was made to found the United States has been the central shaft about which all the other movements and trends of thought have revolved—without changing it in any way. This deeply embedded feeling for a democracy has defeated the more radical thought of each era, such as that of Tom Paine, Gene Debs, Bill Haywood, making their movements and thoughts seem foreign to the environment. It is this same democracy of feeling which will defeat Marxism in America and all other attempts at regimentation of thought and action. It will also defeat fascism—though it may have to pass through that.

This is an idealistic foundation which America has been able to protect because of its isolated geographic position. Only the rather myopic European or Asiatic could fail to sense the essential good humor of the American democratic spirit which permits the brutality of the self-seeker to go its way in the perhaps misguided notion that essential democracy will triumph finally. Be that as it may, the democratic spirit is still the same as it has always been in the United States.

My opinion is that the American tradition is completely opposed to Marxism. America is progressing through difficult mechanistic readjustments which it is confident it can take care of. But Marxism is a static philosophy of a hundred years ago which has not yet kept up—as the democratic spirit has—

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through the stresses of an actual trial. Marxism to the American spirit is only another phase of force opposed to liberalism. It takes a tough theory to survive America, and America thinks it has that theory. Therefore it will smile and suffer, quite secure in its convictions that through all the rottenness, all the political corruption, all the cheap self-interest of its avowedly ruling moneyed class—that it can and will take care of itself when the crisis arrives.

My opinion is that our revolutionary literature is merely tolerated by most Americans, that it is definitely in conflict with our deep-seated ideals. I think the very premises of the revolutionary writers prevent an organic integration with the democratic principles upon which the American spirit is founded.

JOSEPH FREEMAN

IF YOU lose an arm, you are likely to think a great deal about arms; and if you are born into an oppressed nationality you are likely to think a great deal about oppression and about nationalism. Grandfather was a pious Jew in the Ukrainian ghetto, and his whole world revolved around the Jews who were God's chosen people, and whom the Messiah, arriving on a white horse, would some day lead back to Jerusalem. My uncle said the Jews were not a nation, Zionism was a reactionary movement of the Jewish bourgeoisie, and only the social revolution, achieved by the "toiling masses of the world," regardless of race and nationality, would abolish the oppression of man by man and nation by nation. Grandfather, of course, considered my uncle a renegade for being interested in the revolutionary movement. When the Russo-Japanese war broke out, the Czar appealed to my father as a *Russian* to defend his country. But the "goyim," for the most part illiterate peasants inflamed by vodka and official propaganda, had butchered relatives and friends in pogroms, and my father, like many other Jews, felt no enthusiasm for the Czar's country. And the police arrested my uncle, his gentile friends, without racial or national discrimination, and clapped them into jail because they were revolutionaries who agitated for "social justice."

Far off was the land of the free, the asylum of the oppressed, the Golden Realm, America. The streets were paved with gold, everybody was rich, Jew and gentile were equal, there were no class divisions, everyone could go to school and be President of the United States, all races were treated alike, everyone was an American, the most liberated and joyous being on earth.

But here you are at seven in America, in the slums of New York, and utopia is as far off as ever. You are a "greenhorn," an alien, an outsider. You don't belong; you are not an American. Differences of language wall you away from the land and its people, and, as the old Yiddish adage says, it's tough to be a Jew wherever you are. But see, the Jews themselves are divided bitterly. There are two Jewish "nations," the rich and the poor.

As you start to grow up, and read newspapers and books, and go to your first socialist meetings, you discover that the whole of America is divided into "two nations"—Disraeli's illuminating phrase. You read about the massacres at Ludlow and Youngstown, and begin to understand that millionaire Americans maintain their profits by exploiting, oppressing and sometimes killing the Americans who dig the country's coal and mold its steel. And because you live in the slums, and your friends are workers, and your family is poor, and you often go without food, and probably also because you belong to an oppressed race, you identify yourself wholly with the mass of Americans who work, as against the handful of Americans who exploit them, and for the concept *nation* you learn to substitute the concept *class*.

As yet you have not read a word of Marx; the October Revolution is years away; and you do not dream that someday idiots and scoundrels will call you an "agent of Moscow." But you do dream of being a poet, and so the question of art, revolution and nationality becomes, very early in your life, the most pressing of all questions. The native-born American takes his Americanism for granted; the "alien", absorbing America into his heart, being absorbed into its culture, thinks about the meaning of America day and night, for without understanding it he cannot live. But above everything else, stands socialism, the abolition of classes, of poverty, exploitation, oppression, hunger, ignorance, war. And the explanation of these things come to you from native Americans who see no conflict between Americanism and Marxism. Long before I heard of Lenin, long before the October Revolution, I absorbed from American sources those ideas which, followed to their logical conclusion, were bound to lead to communism.

First came the writings of the Founding Fathers, the idealization of Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Tom Paine, the revolutionaries of 1776, the abstract idea of universal liberty which so sharply and happily distinguished America from Czarist Russia. Then came the idealization of Lincoln, the recurring exultation on reading of the war against chattel slavery, on repeating the slogans for the liberation of the Negro. Then the muck-rakers, the books of Lincoln Steffens and Upton Sinclair which castigated the *capitalist* Americans for cheating and betraying the *working* Americans. Finally came the old *Masses* and the *Liberator* in whose pages native Americans like John Reed, Floyd Dell, Robert Minor, Mary Heaton Vorse and others talked about socialism,

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and published radical poems, stories and drawings.

During the war the capitalists of America, like capitalists everywhere, inflamed the worst chauvinist passions. And this time it was from liberal American professors at the university that I heard the counter-attack. What was nationalism? What distinguished America from other countries? One professor proved, by the Socratic method, that nearly every so-called American characteristic was shared by other nations, and what was peculiarly American was ideologically identical with anarchism, notably the cult of the individual.

Certainly, the democratic dogma, which, if anything was American, was the peculiar heritage of this country, did not stand up very well during the war or immediately after it. Obviously, the class-struggle within a nation was more important than those general characteristics which marked all people bound together by a common language, common territory and a common government. It was at this time that I heard Randolph Bourne say: "The ties that bind men are not horizontal but vertical; they go not from land to land, but from class to class and from craft to craft. I have more in common with a German man of letters than with an American capitalist."

No doubt that was why the class-conscious American workers and the idealistic American intellectuals who opposed the imperialist war hailed with such boundless enthusiasm the Russian revolution.

The Russian reactionaries said Marxism was a German idea; the German reactionaries said it was a French idea; the antisemites said it was a Jewish idea. Everywhere the oppressors and their ideologues said that the efforts of the proletariat to abolish poverty and exploitation were incompatible with the national character. Marxism was too rational for the mystic Slav soul, too messianic for the rational French mind, too fantastic for the practical American mind. Yet in every country the most awakened and progressive workers and intellectuals found Marxism the precise answer to their economic, social, political and cultural aims; for them it was perfectly compatible with their national character.

The young American socialist was familiar with these things in the early Twenties, and took them for granted. We stressed the international idea above the national idea, the universal class-war above restricted local characteristics. Indeed, we tended to deny national distinctions altogether, and to divide the world sharply into two classes which completely transcended national frontiers. We even thought this was Marxism.

Such abstractions were shattered when I lived and worked in Europe after the war. I suddenly felt very American; yet I felt closer to the French, Italian and British workers than to the rich American tourists. My first reading of *Main Street* in Paris filled me with nostalgia; a Chaplin film in London, brought a lump to my throat because it reminded me of New York movie houses and the friends with whom I used to go there. Apparently, internationalism did not preclude the existence of national characteristics. There was a difference, however, between the mythical national virtues which the imperialists evoked in contrast to the vices of those nations whom they wanted us to conquer for them, and those national characteristics which developed as a result of environment and history. The war propaganda and the war itself divided us from the Germans; Bach and Hegel and Heine bound us to them. But what bound us most of all to the masses of the German people was the international socialist ideal.

When you asked an educated, i.e. bourgeois or middle-class European in the early Twenties what he thought of America he would tell you America was the land of miracles. Look at its rational use of the machine; its mass production; its scientific organization of labor. But alas, America's wealth was not noble. Its civilization was a loud and banal mechanism. Thought and sensibility were marginal; what was truly American was ugly. Enormous size and sharpness of outline were the only beauty—if you could call it beauty—of which America was capable. Observe Brooklyn Bridge and the skyscrapers. But Europe owed America the wonderful new science of the modern factory, and the full appreciation of the engineer. America represented the tremendously activised energy of man who no longer creates by the sweat of his brow, but merely supervises his mechanical slaves. That is the meaning of "rationalization", a splendid word, a wonderful fulfillment of the spirit. Out of this comes America's tremendous optimism. What a sublime spectacle! More than 120,000,000 people in a crusade against misery. Of course, the details of this crusade are not always pleasant; the people of America are seldom "interesting"; they are uneducated, money-mad, banal. But the great crusade against poverty cleanses all in its fire, in its daring drive toward a new civilization.

This mixture of admiration, snobbishness and envy prevailed before the crash of 1929 not only among the European elite, but also among some of the American expatriates who fled from American "puritanism", dullness, mechanism, and materialism, its alleged hatred of art and the refinements of the spirit. Julien Green, however, inverted this idea. He found on his first visit to America that its people were a young race, overflowing with health, buoyed by a happy mood which repelled the novelist at first —until he discovered that "at the bottom of the American soul lies a profound sadness of which Europe has no idea." Life, Green said, appears to the American as a tragedy. The economic crisis destroyed these illusions; and soon it became apparent that many American characteristics were transfer-

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able. The "mystic" Slav, in a Socialist Society, made even better use of the machine and the engineers, and transcended American democracy.

Perhaps the national characteristics of a people vary with the observer; it depends on the analyst's personal and class characteristics. The French were supposed to be logical, rational, intellectual; they had taste and style and loved freedom. But the reactionaries of Europe, observing the Great Revolution, said the French were volatile, restless, unstable. But who were typical French: Louis XVI and the nobles or Rousseau, Voltaire and Robespierre? Charles X or Saint Simon? Clemenceau or Henri Barbusse? Viviani or Romain Rolland? Who was truly German: Frederick the Great or Goethe? Wilhelm II or Karl Liebknecht? Who was truly American: J. P. Morgan in his Scotch castle or Gene Debs in his Georgia prison?

A nation—Stalin wrote as far back as 1913—*is a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture.*

What, comrade? Did you say *psychologic?* I thought the Marxists ignored psychologic factors in history, and denied specific national characteristics.

Ah, my dear poet, if you want to know what the Marxists think about the relation of socialism to nationality, why don't you read what they actually say about it, instead of spinning it out of your inner consciousness? *Nations,* Stalin wrote in 1913, *differ not only in their conditions of life, but also in spiritual complexion, which manifests itself in peculiarities of national culture. If England, America and Ireland, which speak one language, nevertheless constitute three distinct nations, it is in no small measure due to the peculiar psychological make-up which they developed from generation to generation as a result of dissimilar conditions of existence. Of course, by itself the psychological make-up or, as it is otherwise called, the 'national character', is something indefinable to the observer, but inasmuch as it manifests itself in a distinctive culture common to the nation, it is definable and cannot be ignored. Needless, to say, 'National character' is not a thing that is fixed once and for all, but is modified by changes in the conditions of life. But since it exists at every given moment, it leaves its imprint on the physiognomy of the nation. Thus the community of psychological make-up which manifests itself in a community of culture, is one of the characteristic features of the nation.*

Lenin reminded us that the national question is *subordinate* to the "labor question"; but he also reminded us that national and state differences among peoples and countries will continue to exist for a very long time, even after the dictatorship of the proletariat has been established on a world scale.

Our revolutionary literature is as American as it is Marxist. The works of John Dos Passos, James T. Farrell, Clifford Odets, John Howard Lawson, Josephine Herbst, Robert Cantwell and others are as deeply saturated with the specific details of daily American life as with the proletarian idea of the international socialist revolution. This is only natural. Consider the process by which a creative writer proceeds from national psychology, from the people, the speech, the episodes, the individual characters of his specific locale to the Marxist idea. As a rule the writer does not move from Marxism to his concrete material, but from his concrete material to Marxism. During six years of hunger and suffering in this country he observed what was happening to the people he knew, and only then began to generalize on this experience. When he started to become socially conscious, he usually went first into a free speech fight or a hunger march; the preoccupation with Marxist theory, the attempt to understand experience in general terms came afterward.

The most striking example of the relation between American literature and Marxism may be found in the works of our Negro writers. The Negro in this country has no culture except an American culture; his experience is purely American. But it is the experience of an oppressed race, made conscious at every moment by discrimination and oppression of every kind. A Negro writer cannot write truly without creating scenes and characters and episodes which can only exist in America, and without conveying the shameful and barbarous treatment of his people. That is why the best Negro literature is written by those who have been most conscious of the road toward liberation, by those who have grasped the meaning of Marxism. This indicates the importance of theory.

Without it, mere desire alone would find no solution; and the writer does well to inform his intellect as well as to keep his passion keen, his observation alert, his language precise. When the American writer studies Marx and Lenin he does so in order to apply their teachings to specific American problems. Marxism does not deny variations in national character; it does not deny the importance of the cultural heritage of the past; it makes all the necessary distinctions between creative art and abstract scientific thinking, between poetry and politics; it stresses the importance of form and style as well as theme and content. If it appeals to the best minds of our epoch—White and Negro, gentile and Jew, American and Chinese, German and Briton—it is because Marxism best explains the world in which we live and most clearly shows us how to transform it into something better. This universal idea—vast, fruitful, illuminating, and energising—can only advance American literature, as it has advanced the literature of all other countries where the revolutionary movement has become a popular force in the national life.

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High Gear

NATHAN ASCH

"FOLKS," the pillow man said, "this bus will arrive in Omaha at 11:30 tomorrow night; in Salt Lake at 8:00 the following night, change in Cheyenne. The bus is steam heated; the seats recline at any angle you care to place them. And as a further convenience, the company provides fresh and comfortable pillows for those who wish a luxury of comfort. There is a slight charge of fifteen cents.—Pillows, who wants pillows?"

He walked up and down the aisle, but nobody wanted pillows.

A woman said, "I've got a pillow, but it's home."

The pillow man got off. We lay on our white seat rests, waiting; saw the driver climb into the bus, look at us, count us; watched him shut the door, slide into the seat behind the wheel, twist knobs and push buttons that produced little colored lights on the instrument board; turn off lights in the bus, so that before us in the aisle only tiny spots of red and yellow could be seen; heard the motor turn over, start, be warmed for a while; and then the gear shifted into low, the bus slowly crossed the sidewalk and turned into the street, was clumsily too big and difficult to handle in the city traffic among the agile, pigmy cars and tiny pedestrians.

But as it left the business streets and drove into the more deserted warehouse districts, then through the outlying streets where people lived, and as eventually it left all lighted signs and noises of life and went into the country, with only occasionally brightness in the windows of farmhouses seen—the bus became itself. In high gear now, and humming like a bee, with two great eyes before it, it bore into the breathless darkness, dug into it, pierced it with speed. It seemed to go so fast, so much beyond the safety of light, that looking through the windshield from the driver's seat one became nervous. One thought that though the driver of this bus was an expert, perhaps a silly motorist who was driving maybe drunk beyond the next unseen curve, was coming toward the bus with death in his wheel. Outside the bus was danger. But inside, one glanced at the row after row of reclining seats and saw in the darkness outlines of bodies fitted into angles, trying to find rest; and some relaxed asleep. One watched a cigarette being lighted, the flaring match illuminating a face, and then the red glow of burning ash making the head behind it appear a phantom shape. One thought of tomorrow and what one would see; then the wish projected, jumped into tomorrow; one annihilated distance and time and was fantastically twelve hours in the beyond. But facts were forced into the mind; the present jerked one back inside the bus. One had to accept; for this night it was home.

One turned and looked upon one's neighbor; knees an inch or two away from one's own knees; head so close that one could feel his breath; one had never seen him; peering, one could distinguish only a vague shape. One turned away and tried to reenter the universe outside and failed. The bus vibrated in the road, felt every pebble and transferred through its rubber, wood, and steel the feeling into one's own spine. One became restless; one felt it would be impossible to spend the eternity of the next twenty-four hours inside this tiny space; somehow one had to be free to move to get out.

In desperation one began to talk. One said something banal; one was answered with a banality; one offered a cigarette; with words one searched the neighbor. Talk continued, and time passed; one began to see in the man nearby the beginning of a personality. One became interested and talked on; and one was warmly answered.

Yes, he said, in his life he had done many things. He had skinned mules and laid pipelines and washed dishes and been a plumber and worked on a dredgeboat and been on a section-gang. He had been in the Seminole oil boom and in Monroe, Louisiana, he had worked for the Government. He was fifty-one years old. And in Lake Charles he had done landscape work. He was an expert landscape gardener; he was going out to Carmel, California, where he thought that now he could find a job. It would be just terrible if he couldn't find it, it was so long since he had had work. I asked him if in all his life he had ever saved money, and he said, Yes, a hundred and fifty dollars; and then for two months he had lived like a man. He said it made a different person of him to live like a man.

I turned away and tried to sleep. I couldn't sleep. I watched the vague heads before me in the seats, and wondered why they were in the bus traveling west, north, east. Why were they on the road? Why was the whole world somewhere traveling on some road, waiting for something to happen soon, to happen in another place?

I began to see the entire country with its maze of roads, twining, twisting, entering everywhere, I saw the million automobiles, and trains, and buses, and people walking on the road, all trying to get somewhere. I suddenly saw the map of America, surrounded by the waters, a light-colored continent with scarlet road extending through the States, across mountains, by the sides of the rivers, through the cities, and never getting back anywhere but into itself, being an itself.

But on this imaginary road there were no traffic rules or cops; and the highway was not paved, and the various wagons and automobiles and trains

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rushed one after another, pushed each other out of the way, crashed into each other and never stopped, but continued rushing onward. And one never saw the milepost ahead, one never saw the moment that was coming, but as in a mad darkness one dazedly hurried on and crashed again, and sometimes one got on, and again one had been run over, crushed, and one was no good, discarded; feebly now one went to Carmel, California, to try to get a job as a landscape gardener.

The bus stopped for ten minutes at a rest station. We got out; stretched; we had a cup of coffee or a glass of milk; in the outside darkness we looked up at the stars, but there was still a little bit of dust, and we couldn't see them. We walked up and down in the road; then the driver said, "Everyone inside," and we got back inside, sat down in our seats; the lights again were turned off, the bus started, went faster, speeded on; and we lay and tried to fall asleep.

Poems

The Landlord

Look how he comes, hat in hand,
The head naked, the hands asking
Forgiveness: he comes to the sacrament
Men take meeting together.

We rise, or our breaths rise,
To meet him: we will partake;
We are men meeting together.

But the eyes, oh the eyes
Seeing as eyes from the neutral bird-world,
The eyes, beads, rosary-bead eyes
Of birds jammed to the mesh of a screen,
Flicker through the awful fingers
In our pater-nostering brains.

"I'm sorry, boys"—*Paides, Muchachos,*
"Rent's not paid"—*Knaben*—
The day
Is a hot coal in cupped hands of the season:
The March winds will blow it
To wild fires of crocus, through the funnels
Daffodils shape to the flames of the Spring
Burning our three breasts, the haze and the burning
Of Spring. Coal! Spark! of a day!
The earth tinder for Spring—
The undulant gloss, creeping, of caterpillars—

"The rent isn't paid"—"How hard it is, hard."
But the rent and the mortgage, the taxes—
The blue wings that promise is raising—
"The rent isn't paid—and the taxes, the mortgage."
We all bow our heads, the sacrament taken
Of men meeting together.

Between man and man
The white wings of promising-paper
Ripped, gulled, gutted by wind
Lie, twitching, white wings, in the gutter.

Shall we answer? And hate? Hate?
How shall we hate, make the cold yelping
Hate against else but a man?
Not hate a name, nor a function.
Shall we hate, then, the air common
Among us, filling the bellow-lungs?
Or hate the wen on the back
Of his neck? Which? Which? the air or the wen?
As good, either, as to hate the man posing
As Landlord.

Between man and man
There now is no nexus
Between man and man
There now is no nexus
Save naked self-interest.

A Jew, with a rabbi bush-beard,
Wrote, *Between man and man*
There now is no nexus,
Save naked self-interest: Marx
In the British Museum, where
The naked Greek boys and naked
Greek women are lodged, frozen forever,
In marble. *Between man and man*

"The rent isn't paid. Will you go—
Hard it is, hard, the mortgage, the taxes—
Now or tomorrow? Boys?"
Paides, Muchachos, Knaben.

And he, man for his rent,
And we, men for our shelter, are naked
Shamed men, hating the sacrament
Of men meeting together: The Rent.

KENNETH WHITE

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Plea for an Epitaph

It is a long war. We are without supplies,
There is poison in the meat, the foe is invisible.

At night, crouched trembling in the caves of our minds,
We hear the crash of breaking terrors over our heads.
And deep below, a stealthy creeping, the treason of our wills!

We were not bred to this. We sicken at blood,
Our guts knot up and crawl at the touch of steel.
We gaze at our shambling bodies, stinking of fear.
There was bright sun—wood-smoke sharp in our nostrils—
Hammers ringing—the quick eyes of the girls . . . .
Blinded by this we fall into the traps of poisoned air.

Will they come? we wonder. They will come, we know!
They will be sons of ours, bred of our haggard loves,
Eyes clear of hatred, hands steady to kill
And steady to build. Their armor will be strong,
Maps true, brains crafty and quick.
Their sons will say
Where the hammers ring, where the girls sing in the sun:
My father was grim; *his* father was a coward.

Say this at least for us, when the war is won:
Though our hearts were faint, and we knew we were no fighters,
We went to the field. And in madness fled, wept,
Begged for mercy, turned like cornered rats.
And yet in our way we held the field, refused
Sweet death, until we knew our sons had come.
Death cheered us, wiping the stain of our cowardice
From their steady banners advancing under the sun.

HAROLD A. BONER

Memory at Night

Speak
of the dream remembered in the night,
Seek the return though no path leads man back,
and crazed streets lie behind a mad-house wall
studded with glass like pansies. Moonlight cuts
false patterns of escape upon the ground
and the dream is forgotten,
the door is locked,
the key is lost.

Through twisted years the tension test was tried
until the wire snapped.
Curled singing sound
was bridge across the time that flowed
between the past and present. Bright and still
the morning lay on streets my childhood knew,
burst into shining fragments with the scream
of Peace that shook the heavens. Streets were filled
and lips knew laughter. Eyes burnt out by tears
were lit again.
But this remains as well:
After the streets were silent, after sound
was a crushed and muddy rattle on the ground
the news came back,
the armistice was false.

EDWARD J. FITZGERALD

The Scab

—Two Choruses from a Play

when a millionaire gyps a millionaire
the loser has a long way to fall
down through all the levels of luxury:
kaleidoscope of three-color ads—
before assails him the knowledge that
man is a savage in the forest where
death leaps through the trees, that
the machines in his factory were gadgets merely
to keep death at a greater distance, that
now his soft hands must dig his grave—
when a worker gyps a worker, there's
no place to fall:
relegated to the bottom of the shaft
he peers through the darkness at the patch of sky
where the beautiful ads like clouds float by
and he knows damn well who's at the door:
precise as a western union clock—
his landlord, death

II

now that Zanelli, the sick man, is gone
you two left alone are assailed by doubt like a disease—
somewhere in the far-flung impersonal world
which you took for granted yesterday
a sabotage switch was thrown:
the trains are stalled, the lights are out:
mechanical arm truncated in mid-air:
semaphore like a broken wing
above the twisted rail where now at dawn
across the mangled bodies you two alone
face one another for your life in a dead world—
each of you crying hard for
his precious world, his sure world
where no treachery lurks
where a woman like wax has so often taken the impression
of how you feel that your loneliness breaks down
and pours singing into her body when she comes close—
where yesterday was rhythm of work
today each of you quickly out of hurt like a snail
pulls in to the shore of his sure investments
and speculates how dangerous the sea
between him and his friend who suddenly
is become a stranger

HECTOR RELLA

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The People's Choice

RUTH KRONMAN

THERE was no heat in the radiators, and I lay uncomfortably under a blanket reading a magazine article about how this country will never have a revolution because of the "wholesome respect for democratic procedure that is the strongest tradition of the American people. From the New England town meeting to the present day. . . . " I let the magazine drop.

"Damn it, it's cold here. I bet it's warmer outside."

Martin said, "Let's go out for a walk."

So we went down our five flights. This is the pleasantest time of the year, if any, to live in downtown New York. People are out walking; not as in the summer, because they can't find anything to do with their uncomfortable selves; and not as in winter, because in spite of wanting to stay home they have to go somewhere, and walk very determinedly. They're out walking on nights like this because it is a pleasure to walk along, to look at the other people, to look at the shop windows, to stop a while at street meetings. We walked around. The communists on their usual corner were sending words about the war and the high cost of living and the responsibility of government into that place in a person, it seems to be the head, where one mulls over these things or suddenly understands them as if he had known them all his life. And as always they were sending a great many of these ideas right over the heads of the people who were looking into windows at things they couldn't buy.

We passed a hat store with a sign, *Board of Registration.*

"Oh, that's right", Martin said. "Let's go over and register."

We went in and asked a cop where to register. "Ask her", he said. So we asked a nice stout lady, and she told us.

Back up the street in a hurry now; we were walking with a purpose. We found the place where we were to inscribe ourselves as two of those who signify the people's choice. It was in a barber shop under the shadow of the El.

We walked in. It was funny. The stout blonde lady and the young fellow and the others with their seven-dollar-a-night jobs were sitting around a table in the rear of the shining white-and-mirror, steamy-smelling place. A big cop sitting in a barber chair looking bored; and the box for enrolments was sitting in another barber chair. I stood back of a little gray-looking man wondering, What on earth brings him here, what does he expect to get out of it, isn't this *funny?* I had to repress an impulse to giggle. So I winked at Martin, and that made it easier to stand in line in the barber shop, wondering and wondering.

"Look who's here", Martin whispered.

"Who? Oh, the kid from our house." He was taking registrations. Funny that a kid who hangs around the doorstep flirting with the girls should be inscribing us on a book. I began to respect at least the externalia of democracy. Where but in America?

Me next. Four or five people waiting with their pens, to write down all about me in four or five books. I stood there and told them how old I was and where I lived last year and where I was born and all that, and they wrote it all down. I was almost nervous. It's very democratic, our system—even J. P. Morgan has to do that when he registers, or does he? Did he ever register in a barber shop, I wonder? But then, he doesn't have to vote—why should he? It was most exciting. I could almost reach out and touch the democracy all around.

We felt exhilarated as we left. A little thin man with a cigar shook hands with Martin.

He said, through his cigar, "Mr. . . ."

"Franken," Martin said. The man scribbled it in a book.

"Pleased to know you, Mr. Franken. My name's Stutz. I live at 211, also."

"That so?"

"Well—" He reached out to shake hands again. Martin shook his hand seriously.

"Well", he said, thinking it over, "good night. See you again, eh?"

"Good night", Martin said.

The man nodded to me. I nodded very properly. We left.

"That's what you read about. Ward heeler. He'll be around to see us."

I wanted to know, "Why didn't he speak to me? You know, wnen he comes around and asks me how I'm going to vote I'll tell him you haven't made up your mind yet."

We walked around some more. It was exhilarating, like going to a movie that doesn't make sense but is easy to take. You shut your mind and forget all about the opium of the people and art is real, art is earnest, and you make believe movies haven't any relation to life or any effect on people, and you can be really amused. It's something like taking a few drinks. So we walked around, sort of intoxicated with democracy and the freshness of the air even under the El, and the bright white moon over the top of the sickly yellow clock on the Consolidated Gas Company.

Finally we walked back to the house, and I re-

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membered that we needed milk. So we went across the street to Mike's. I like the way the lights shine through the store window making a square box of light on the pavement, and the way you have to climb up three wooden steps past onions and potatoes and celery. It reminds me of the general store at Huntersville, of beloved memory. I always feel as if I'm going home when I go into Mike's little dairy and appetizing store with a few fruits and vegetables for accomodation.

The boy was there—the one, nameless, whom I always call "You know, the one who hangs around the doorstep all the time, the one who told me when we moved in that we wouldn't get enough heat." There was another fellow with him. Somehow we started talking about this and that and the next. I've always wondered what those fellows talk about, hanging around the store all day and all night, but it's easy. You just talk and it's very nice, neighborly.

We were talking about how cold it was in the house.

I said, "I'll just move out. I won't stay in a cold house. I won't sit around in a bathrobe all day and get tonsillitis."

Mike was trying to console me. "Now Mrs. Franken, it's not as bad as that. She gives steam. I lived myself in that house two years."

The boy who hangs around kept repeating, "Were you ever there in the daytime? From ten to five you can be dying and not a drop of steam. You moved out finally, didn't you?"

"Well, you know how it is, my wife just come from the hospital, you know how a woman is, she didn't feel so good, and with the infant . . . . You know. There was steam, but not *enough* steam. That was it. Steam, but not enough."

"Oh, but were you ever there in the day, from ten to four? You can be dying . . . . I know, I stay home all day with my sister's kid, and I know."

The other boy said, "The landlady thinks she can save money bankin' the fire." He shook his head, pulled his lips down at the corners. "Never save a penny that way."

I insisted, "I'll move out. I don't have to live there."

The nameless boy said, "Yeah, that's just what she told my sister. 'You don't have to live here', she told her. And then the old skinflint 'll tell you you got rooms like Park Avenue, and she'll talk you out of it."

"She won't talk me out of a cold radiator." I was getting very belligerent. "Well," I said to Mike, "give me a pint of milk."

The little man, what was his name, Stutz, came in.

"Hello, Mr. Franklin. Franklin is the name, I believe?"

Martin agreed. Why argue?

He was drawn into the steam discussion.

The boy who hangs around said, "The landlady don't listen to nobody."

"She'll listen to her pocketbook all right. If the tenants got together and didn't pay the rent she'd listen."

"She'd stick a dispossess under your door in three days. I know her."

Mr. Stutz was buttonholing Martin. "See here, Mr. Franklin, you talk to her. Speak up, she'll listen to you, you know tenants like you don't grow on bushes. She's got some she don't care about, but a professional man . . . she'll listen to you. Speak right up to her."

Mike interrupted. "Say, Mr. Stutz, he knows how to talk—even if he ain't going around to get votes."

Stutz laughed a little weakly, and said, "Who's tryin' to get votes?" Pretty soon he got his loaf of bread and can of salmon and went out with one "Good night, everybody," and one "Good night, Mr. Franklin."

Martin said to Mike, "What's he, anyway?"

Mike said, "Nothing. Walks around gettin' votes."

"Has he got a job?"

"Who job? What job? He used to have the real dough . . . "

The boy interrupted. "That's what he says."

"Well, whatever it is, he's in the Lieberman Club now."

"Oh."

The boy said, "My sister, you know, she works for Braverman, and she got Joe—this kid that's over taking the registration—in over at the Braverman Club. Then this guy Stutz comes along and says, You better be for the Lieberman Club, and gets him this job. So now he's a Lieberman."

"And the little guy is a Lieberman?" says Martin.

"Yeah."

"Well, I guess I'll be a Braverman."

Everybody laughed.

"I don't sign up with none of the parties", said the nameless boy. "All a bunch of crooks. My sister, she knows what's goin' on inside, see what I mean, and I wouldn't sign for none of 'em."

Mike laughed. "You know how I signed?" He rubbed the side of his cheek with his hand, stood with one hand under the white apron, leaned contemplatively on the icebox. "You remember last year came out a notice there was a month's leeway on the beer license? So I figured I'll wait a month, the money's as good to me as to them. So I go down to get my license the last couple days, and they say to me, 'You didn't get your Federal license. You been selling beer without a license.' 'What about the thirty days leeway?' I asked them. 'Oh, that's

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just for the city. You'll hear from the Federal Government about this. There's a fifty dollar fine.' Jees, I think, fifty dollars. So I come back and wait. One day I see them coming in—big guys, look like dicks. I would of known 'em if I met 'em even in Coney Island in swimming. I was standing right here"—he ran around in front of the counter into the middle of the store—"right here, and my wife was behind the counter. I wink to her, 'Tell 'em I'm out.' When they come in my wife says, 'My husband isn't in right now.' So they told her, same thing they told me. They say they're from Washington—not from New York, mind you, but straight from Washington. From Washington they got to come for a guy like me. Imagine."

The boy said, "They didn't *live* in Washington. They were from the government, but they lived right here in New York, not in Washington."

"No, they shown my wife the papers. Honest I didn't know what to do. Fifty dollars. So I run around, first to Lieberman, then to Braverman. They wouldn't do nothing—I never bothered with them before. So I went to the Progressive Club—Republican, you know—I figure maybe they can do something. Sure enough. They put it down to five. I slapped down five dollars. And since then I'm a Republican. That's all."

He laughed, shook his head over it. The boy guffawed. We all laughed.

I took three rolls and the pint of milk, paid the sixteen cents. "Good night, everybody." "Good night."

Homecoming

ALFRED MORANG

"SO YOU'VE come back," Pa Brown said. His eyes dropped to the floor. His hands touched the chair arm. Under the fingers the wood was sweat damp.

Dan scraped the window frost. He had to do something. This homecoming was different than he had planned. Perhaps walking streets, seeing so many faces all frowning, eyes hard sending out thoughts, hating bums, had gotten into him. He had known that his father was out of work, but Elismont is a small town, and people seem to be able to live with almost no money in a small town.

Ma Brown smiled. It was a dead smile.

Sister Gladys said, "Let's eat now, Ma." Then she coughed, rasping hard.

Dan placed one eye close to the frost hole. Outside, the street was dim. A man was passing, a man bent low against the bitterness of winter wind.

"There's not much to eat in the house," Ma Brown said.

Pa Brown walked to the window, standing high above Dan. "You'd been just as well off in the city, Dan. There's nothing here for anyone. I've been out of work for two years." His voice was thin. It seemed to quiver in the chill that seeped through window cracks.

"It's been hard, walking. . . . Why, I even bummed." Dan paused. He had not meant to say that, but the words had forced themselves into sounds. Dan was afraid. He had thought on those streets about home, about his father. A fellow's father will help him . . . share his bread.

Mrs. Brown said, "Dan, take this dime and go down town. There's one store that stays open all evening. Get ten cents' worth of meal."

Sister Gladys placed her hands on the table top, looking past them all at the frosty window. "It's getting cold in here," she said.

Dan laughed. He felt a rising anger. It was like a slow fire suddenly leaping into life. He had come home, and this was the way they acted! At least they could be glad to see him. "Sure I'll go down, Ma, but let's get something more than meal. How about some meat?" His mouth watered at the word. When Dan closed his eyes he could taste the stale bread crusts from back-of-restaurant cans . . . taste the rankness of his hunger-empty mouth.

Pa Brown turned. His eyes were dead . . . like a fish, Dan thought. "You've got to understand, Dan. When you went away, things were different. I had a job. We did have meat three times a week . . . but you can't buy meat on nothing. That dime is the last money we've got. I earned it." He looked at the floor, his lips twitching; then he straightened. "Shoveling dung, if you want to know. Yes, doing what I never thought I'd do." His voice fell.

Sister Gladys began to cry. The lamp sputtered.

Ma Brown said, "There's no more oil. I guess Dan came at a hard time. We've never been so hard up in our lives."

Dan scraped on the frost-covered glass. He was trying to think. Perhaps he had been a fool to come back . . . but those streets and faces . . . wind chill creeping through the thinness of his clothes! The anger flamed. His mind seemed bursting. He was hungry. No one had said, "Won't you have a cup of hot tea?" when he had opened the door. They had only looked into his face, dully, almost as though they were afraid to ask him into the room.

"You don't have to feed me. I'll find something to

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do." The words were defiant. Then he added, "I'll shovel dung. I'll do anything. You don't know what it's like, walking, sleeping in doorways, having cops rout you out."

Sister Gladys looked up. "No, but I know what it is to have people look at me and say, 'That's Old Man Brown's daughter. Look at the rags.' I know what it is to want to marry some one and have to say, 'My father hasn't a job.' No man wants to marry a girl that's living on corn meal . . . not in this town, anyway. What a person is, counts."

Dan faced them. The lamp went out. Through the half darkness he could see sister Gladys's face, a white blur above the dim table. Outside, feet scraped over the road snow. Dan buttoned his coat. It was an old army coat.

Pa Brown scratched a match. "It's hard on Gladys," he said. "You know, Dan, folks here judge you by how much you make. It doesn't matter that I had a good job keeping books in the shoe factory. No, it doesn't make any odds what I did. I'm broke now."

Ma Brown was sobbing.

Dan opened the door. "I'll get the meal," he said. "I'll be right back."

Outside, the wind was sweeping up the hill in icy gusts. It crept through the worn cloth coat. Dan shivered. When he looked back, the house was a deeper shadow in the night.

People looked into his face. One man said, "Did you do well in the city, Dan?" Then he laughed, adding, "I guess you come home to a mighty poor father. When a man doesn't lay aside money for the future, there's not anything to fall back on when a rainy day comes along."

The man back of the counter said, "Here's your meal, Dan." Then he reached up and took a can from a shelf. It was a can deeply dented, a can of beans. "Here, Dan. Give this to your mother. It fell on the floor and hit a box. I can't sell it, and at times like these it's a crime to throw even a can of beans away."

Dan took the can. For a long time he looked at the dented tin. People in the store were whispering. The whispering was like the wind, chill and bitter.

"Thanks, Mr. Joy . . . thanks . . . ," Dan heard his own voice. He wanted a cigarette, to drag the smoke deep into his lungs.

The man smiled and said, "I'm sorry you came home, in a way, Dan. Things have been mighty hard for your father the last two years. I hope you try and get work, though there's no work that I know of."

Out on the street Dan paused. An old newspaper was whirling across the street. His mind was blank, dead. Streets . . . people looking into his face. He had dreamed in doorways, when his feet were numb with cold . . . dreamed that on these home streets there would be kind faces, voices greeting, glad that he had come home. It had been foolish. The newspaper caught about his ankles. Dan kicked the paper. High overhead the moon came out. It was a thin disc, cold and blue-white.

Dan glanced up. There was some one coming, a boy perhaps twelve years old. He had no cap. His hair was tossed by the wind. All at once, Dan knew. He had scraped a hole in the frost and seen a man, bent, walking into the coming night. He had heard voices . . . and taken a damaged can of beans. Dan laughed.

The boy stopped. "What's funny, Mister? I don't see anything to laugh at. It's awful cold."

The newspaper blew away, lifting in small crazy movements.

"There's nothing funny, kid. No, nothing funny, that you can see. Do you know where Mr. Brown lives, up on the hill?"

The boy nodded. "My head is near frozen," he said. "Times are hard. Ma says we're lucky to have a roof, let alone having cold heads."

Dan repeated, "Do you know where Mr. Brown lives, up on the hill?"

The boy said, "Yes, I know. He's the man that cleans backhouses . . . only folks don't pay much now . . . maybe fifty cents. My pa says he won't bother. He'd rather go hungry than do that."

Dan passed the boy the bundle. "Here, take this to Mr. Brown. I'll give you my cap for pay. Then your head won't be cold."

Lights in the store went out. Dan pushed his cap low over the boy's eyes. "Hurry, Mrs. Brown wants that bundle," Dan said. The boy ran down the street, grasping the bundle tightly in his arms. There would be corn mush and beans. Perhaps they had not eaten beans for a long time. Perhaps it would be weeks before another can fell and was damaged.

On the outskirts of the town, Dan hailed a truck.

The driver said, "Walking far? It's a hellish night to walk."

Dan nodded. "Yes," he said. "Yes, I'm going a long ways. I don't know how far."

He reached into the pocket of his coat and pulled a crust of bread from the dirt-stained depths, lifting it to his lips, the stale taste filling his mouth, as the driver said, his voice half drowned by the engine and the rushing of wind, "I'll give you a lift as far as Bangor. After that, you'll have to walk. Most of the drivers have orders not to take bums on . . . but I ain't got the heart to refuse. It's a hellish night to walk."

Dan swallowed the crust. Then he closed his lips. His eyes closed, and there was only a taste of hunger, an empty taste, that mingled with dreams, dreams of going home . . . where a lamp full to the brim of oil lighted a table piled high with food.

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THEATRE CHRONICLE

N. G. Chernishevsky wrote in *Life and Esthetics* (see *International Literature,* 10, 1935): "Only subject matter worthy of the attention of thoughtful man (sic) can save art from the reproach that it is the empty amusement which it all too frequently is. An artistic form will not save a work from contempt or a smile of commiseration at best, if the underlying idea does not give a positive answer to the question, 'Was it worth bothering about'?"

This comment is so pertinent to the drama—New York, 1936—that it scarcely requires elaboration. Most of the productions one sees on the American stage are just not worth the attention of intelligent audiences. If a production is not worth bothering about, it seems pointless to practice diplomacy in order that the feelings of a playwright or of his friends go undamaged. There are plays, such as *Dead End,* which merit critical contempt. Others, like Maxwell Anderson's muddle-headed *Winterset,* deserve, at best, a smile of commiseration. Still others, *Parnell* for instance, are worth no more than a yawn, if that much.

The revolutionary movement promises to alter this condition in the contemporary theatre. But if it is to fulfill this promise to the degree that it should, it must protect itself lest it become infected with the vices of the commercial drama. One of its instruments of protective innoculation is criticism. Criticism and reviewing should be, primarily, the means of judgment, interpretation, and evaluation. If the critic or the reviewer sacrifices this function in order to become an agent of professional encouragement, he will quickly become indistinguishable from many of the bourgeois critics whom he professes to despise. If he places the task of judgment subsidiary to that of filling theatres, and sending his readers to bookstores to buy books, he is on the way to becoming a sheep herder. For when he does that, he treats his readers like sheep, and as nothing else. If he assumes for his readers, an intelligence equal to his own, he will then argue his judgments and evaluations. In order to do this, it is not always necessary to be sanctimoniously noble, ponderous, heavy, or polysyllabic; criticism and reviewing can well perform their tasks and still rely on irony, satire, sarcasm and yes—even contempt. Finally, if criticism and reviewing in the revolutionary cultural movement are going to play their parts properly, critics and reviewers must realize that they cannot have one set of criteria for "bourgeois" authors, and another for their "own" writers. If anything, they should be more severe upon revolutionary writers than upon others. We must not forget these words of Lenin: "But can anything more 'shallow' be imagined than an opinion of a world tendency that is based on nothing more than what the representatives of that tendency say about themselves?"

There are plays worth bothering about, plays like, to mention a few; Albert Bein's *Little Ol' Boy* and *Let Freedom Ring, Waiting for Lefty* and *Awake and Sing,* and *The Children's Hour.* But when a play or a book is not worth bothering about, I think that they deserve only one kind of treatment—annihilation. Hence, as long as I write this chronicle I do not intend to practice the dull-witted affectation of balancing plus and minus signs over inept plays so that I might arrive at a painless zero.

It is rewarding, then, to remark that the two plays I shall speak of in this particular chronicle are, whatever else may be said of them, worth bothering about; at least, they are worth some attention from an intelligent audience. And I think left wing audiences that have appreciated and applauded as fine a play as *Sailors of Cattaro,* can be considered intelligent. I do not assume for myself the impertinence of treating such audiences like sheep.

In *Russet Mantle,* Lynn Riggs dramatizes the conflict between an older and a younger generation of the middle class. The action takes place on a New Mexican ranch. The owner, Horace Kincaid, is a Babbitt who has made money back east in real estate, and lost much of it in speculations; he busies himself with an apple orchard, the daily reports on the stock market, and he wistfully desires to return east. His wife Susanna is childless and unhappy as the result of a marriage for security rather than for love; she raises chickens. Her sister Effie, and her niece Kay, are visiting them from Louisville. Effie is languorous, and empty-headed, a characteristically shallow middle class southern matron. Her daughter, Kay, is blindly revolting against the traditions of her elders; the girl's rebellion manifests itself in a ruthless and discomforting honesty, and a sexual promiscuity that veers toward self-conscious but uncongenital nymphomania. John Galt, a poet happens along, seeking any kind of employment. Susanna hires him to help her with the chickens. The elder people treat him like a freak—a poet; they confide in him their secret dreams; and Horace attempts to imbue the lad with the ideals of a Babbitt. John and Kay take turns resisting each other; then they fall in love, and Kay becomes pregnant. The elders act in pattern, and denounce the young man. After a moment of hesitancy, Kay declares that she is going off with him. Whether life in depression-America be good, or ill, they will live in it.

Mr. Riggs has written a sprightly and amusing comedy. It is held together principally because of the playwright's success in his characterizations of the older people; his two women, Susanna and Effie are effectively drawn. Effie (played by Margaret Douglas so that everything is gotten out of the role) is a perfect delineation of the female product of the Southern upper classes. As a comedy the play is both rich and amusing.

However, Mr. Riggs attempted to write more than a comedy. He constantly veers from his comedy vein to one that is more serious, without satisfactorily integrating the two. Thus, he writes excellent if light dialogue; suddenly this vein will be weighted with "poetic" lines, which are usually out of time and off character. Attempting to endow his people with more significance, he gives each of them a "dream." He allows his young people to talk seriously of their plight, their world, their future in a manner that is familiar; it becomes rather adolescent philosophizing. In contrast to the excellently depicted older people, the hero is a self-confident Moon Calf, and the heroine is one of the Beautiful and the Damned. And they sometimes seem to echo unfresh banalities. Even from the viewpoint of "social" content, this side of the play is less rewarding than the straightforward characterizations of the older people, particularly Effie. *Russet Mantle* remains an amusing and sprightly comedy with some value for its *implicit* social comment.

I am somewhat reluctant to speak of *Love on the Dole,* by Ronald Gow and Walter Greenwood, in much detail because I discover that Stanley Burnshaw has competently said most of the things about the play that I should mention

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in detailed discussion. (See *New Masses,* March 10). The characters—members of the British proletariat—live on the subsistence level; they are drugged by poverty, and by petty bourgeois British *respectability*. The social level treated is analogous to that in Sean O'Casey's great plays of the Dublin Irish, *Juno and the Paycock,* and *The Plough and the Stars,* or to that of Pat O'Mara's excellent book, *The Autobiography of a Liverpool Irish Slummy*. The drama can be classified as a case history of the cost of capitalism; its cynical ending underlines it with effective irony. The first two acts are a bit dull, and the dialogue is literal and somewhat colorless. The play is redeemed by a moving, even powerful last scene, when the meaning of the destinies here treated is made strikingly clear and forceful. The authors however, mussed their work up somewhat because of their ineffectual treatment of the hero. Intended as a class-conscious working class leader, he is actually a peg on which the heroine's love is hung. The direction stupidly enhances this weakness. Thus, in act two there is an offstage demonstration of the unemployed who have been stricken off the dole. The hero, already ill, rushes out to save the men from the machinations of a raving agitator. The issue is one whether the demonstrators will march down a street forbidden by the police, or whether they will take a course chartered by themselves. In the succeeding riot, the hero is killed. From offstage, we hear the demonstrators singing *The Internationale*. If they are politically advanced, the motivation of the play suffers, because then they would not be so blindly led by this agitator. He comes on the stage as a raving and unmotivated fanatic who is contrasted to the ostensibly more sane hero. Such inconsistencies, in both the writing and the direction, are inexcusable. However, the authenticity of the material, the plodding sincerity of the authors, plus the fine acting of Miss Wendy Hiller, and the moving last act all tend to make *Love on the Dole* a drama that is decidedly worth bothering about.

JAMES T. FARRELL

CHARLIE'S CRITICS

Inspiration for making this comment on Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* came a few nights ago at the ringside in St. Nicholas Arena. A rangy middleweight called Willie Neglis, 154½, was fighting Frank Taibi, 149½, a bartender by profession. Taibi fought a crouch and did alright in the first, but toward the end of the second a wild looping left caught him flush on the mouth and as he straightened at the impact Neglis chopped short to the chin. No blood, it was very clean and Taibi went cold flat on his back. It was minutes before some of his muscles began to quiver, at first he lay with his head in the resin maybe two yards from me. His jaw hung loose to the side and the mouthpiece bulged red. His cheeks were hollowed by the loose jaw and the whole face was inanimate and stupid with the final stupidity of the knocked out man. He looked so gruesomely, terrifyingly stupid it became impossible for me to avoid thinking of the reviews Chaplin received in the capitalist press, in *The Nation* and *The New Republic,* and, alas, the *Sunday Worker*.

At this point it might be advisable to observe that, among other things, Chaplin's film contains the finest satire on the speedup system ever to appear on screen, canvas or paper. It contains a starving family of four where the father is shot in an unemployed demonstration, two of the hungry children are whisked away by callous orphanage officials, the other is forced to live by stealing. It has a blustering, ferocious boss, hundreds of unemployed gathering helplessly outside the factory gates, brutal police, the spectacle of a barefoot tattered girl let loose among the luxuries in a department store, and it has burglars who ply their trade out of desperate necessity, and it has scenes of life in a Hooverville shanty.

These are some of the representative sequences. Remember them while you read the following sentence out of Joseph Gollomb's review which appeared, by one of those curious quirks of modern times which Chaplin will undoubtedly include in his next picture, on a page of the *Sunday Worker*: "If our intellectuals try to find social meaning in the film the joke will be as good as any in *Modern Times.*" Now since revolutionaries have been known to wield a certain influence in editing the *Sunday Worker* presumably "our intellectuals" does refer to Communists, the very folk who for so many years have insisted that every picture had social meaning. Even assuming that Gollomb means *conscious* social meaning, can it be that the sequences above escaped his attention? No, he lists them all in his answer to a protest letter. At the same time, he contends that all this well-intentioned satire was invalidated by "a series of minuses." Two minuses, to be exact.

Minus One is that Charlie secures a job "through a letter of warm commendation given him by a sheriff because Charlie had sided with the authorities against some of his fellow boarders in jail." Obviously, this is nothing but a harmless device for liberating Charlie that he might continue his adventures.

Minus Two is that "When Paulette and Charlie meet, fall in love and make a home together they are radiant in having each other with not a thought of how the youngsters (her little brother and sister) are faring . . . This is no way, I submit, for any hero and a heroine to behave, especially in a film supposed to have social meaning." The two kiddies were by then in an orphan asylum. What should Charlie and Paulette have done—collect a demonstration and storm the joint?

Also, there are two minor minuses, one that Charlie is but an inadvertent member of the unemployed demonstration, two, that the factory's "machinery turns out to be gadget for comic use, like a trick cigar. Charlie and another worker get caught in the steel maw of this machinery; and the sequence sets the audiences roaring with good belly laughter." For the life of me I can't see anything wrong or anti-social in these things.

Substantially, in *The New Republic,* Otis Ferguson makes the same point as Gollomb: "Well, the truth is that Chaplin is a comedian; he may start off with an idea, but almost directly he is back to type again, the happy hobo and blithe unregenerate, a little sad, a little droll. Whatever happens to him happens by virtue of his own naive bewilderment, prankishness, absurd ineptitude and the constant support of very surprising coincidence." And Mark Van Doren in *The Nation* says "Chaplin has not changed. The little monkey . . . still expresses himself in terms of the purest, the most disinterested comedy . . . it is something quite timeless and priceless." Then he compares Charlie to Harpo Marx.

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At the outset of the picture Chaplin has a job tightening nuts on pieces of steel along a fast moving belt. The belt moves faster and faster and eventually Charlie is driven crazy and loses his job. This is "absurd ineptitude."

He walks through a great crowd of unemployed men at the factory gate. This is "timeless and priceless."

When as night watchman in a department store he treats his former fellow workers, now burglars, to the best in the house, gives them the finest champagne, that is "the purest the most disinterested comedy."

After he goes crazy and runs amok with the tools still in his hands he meets a woman who has buttons on her breasts, buttons just like the nuts on the belt. He wants to tighten these nuts and he chases the woman. Between this and Harpo's arbitrary chasing of every blonde in sight, Mark Van Doren can detect no difference.

At the end Charlie and his girl walk off hand in hand toward the horizon. I don't see how that invalidates the picture or robs it of artistic unity, as several of the reviewers claim. Did Voltaire invalidate *Candide* when he ended by advising people to cultivate their gardens? Should Swift have appended a note on dialectical materialism to top off the Bickerstaff papers?

Candide was written in 1759, the Bickerstaff papers in 1708, and *Modern Times* was produced in 1935. Of course. But Chaplin is no more an artist of the proletarian revolution than Voltaire or Swift. And in view of his background and development it would appear futile to demand that he become one. Charmion Von Wiegand, who in *New Theatre* magazine has written the only serious analysis of the picture to date, regrets that "To the end Charlie remains the same lonely little *individual*. . . . He has learned nothing from his unfortunate adventures, experiences from which the most obdurate and thickheaded individual would conceivably have gained some knowledge or common sense." She thinks Chaplin ought to discard the old Charlie costume and character, ought definitely to espouse the cause of "the vast majority of common folk from whom he has always drawn his strength." In short, he ought to be a revolutionary.

That would not only be fine but miraculous, and I don't think he will ever make it. Not because he is a pure, disinterested, timeless and priceless comedian either. Chaplin has had his chances to learn about the revolution and there is no evidence he took much advantage of them. For all that, we must look at *Modern Times* as something that came out of Hollywood. That is what makes Chaplin great and his picture a tremendous achievement. Chaplin is an individualist, he is a romantic, but not romantic enough to have closed his eyes to the most fundamental cruelties of bourgeois society. To film these things beautifully and bitterly is a contribution as important as that of Dreiser in literature.

Unfortunately, this reviewer has misgauged his space again and there is no room to analyze the remarkable critiques accorded the picture by the metropolitan press. Let us summarize them therefore in the words of Miss Bland Johaneson of the *Daily Mirror*: "It adheres to the Chaplin tradition, sweet, sentimental and touching." That day the *Mirror* printed another splendid article, an interview with Carole Lombard. "Half the leading men today," she said, "either can't act, look like coal heavers in dinner clothes or make love like wrestlers. But good actors or not, they should be virile."

EDWARD NEWHOUSE

BOOKS

The Last Platonist

THE LAST PURITAN, *by George Santayana. Charles Scribner's Sons. $2.75.*

The Last Puritan is a laboratory of the imagination in which ideal codes of living, usually distinctly embodied in the characters, sometimes criss-crossing, battle for supremacy. Like Pater's *Marius The Epicurean,* it is built of moods and philosophic discourses; the action remains largely an accompaniment to the main theme. But, despite the fact that *The Last Puritan* has a more recognizable pattern of events, it is a more intangible work than *Marius The Epicurean.* Pater was stating a creed— a kind of orderly, Victorian Epicureanism: Santayana is destroying a creed, Puritanism, through a history of its effects on Oliver Alden, the central character, and through a counter-creed which is a vague mixture of Paganism, Platonism, and a very civilized animal freedom. This release from Puritanism into another form of living is as devoid of practical meaning as purification by fire, since Santayana finds the alternative to Puritanism in the green fields, in the sunlight of past culture, in the animal instincts, in the creative imagination. All fine things,—but how are they to be integrated into any given form of living?

Without some knowledge of Santayana's philosophy, *The Last Puritan* would be a very baffling book. It is not so much a fulfillment of his ideas as an illustration of them in the lives of his chosen characters. It would have been impossible for Santayana to sink his philosophy into the currents of modern life because it is basically so detached from the world about us. For years Santayana has been inhabiting a hermitage of the mind. A sensitive, erudite, imaginative man, he has been constructing a modern version of Platonism, preserving its pagan will to live and to know, its Christian sense of order, and its Greek assumption of gentlemanly leisure, and reworking its metaphysic to introduce a more naturalistic view of the world. Plato's ideal essences of which events in this world are merely a copy become for Santayana the essential qualities of things which men continually discover. Santayana clears away what for him are the errors, the superstitions, the dogmas of the past by an astringent skepticism, and then he builds his doctrine of essence on "animal faith", which is a natural, animal acceptance of things and events. In its non-technical aspects Santayana's philosophy can be seen as the intelligent, semi-poetic speculations of a cloistered thinker, sailing the high seas of past thought, never mooring at some junction of contemporary conflict. Strip the cloak of timelessness which musty academicians have draped around philosophers, and they stand out as exponents of some leading ideas of their time. Santayana, on the other hand, has been roaming through side-paths. I offer these remarks, of course, not as a philosophic criticism of Santayana's position, but as a comment on his essential romanticism, his detachment from the noise and bustle of contemporary ideas.

As Santayana explains, Oliver Alden is the last Puritan, not because there will be no others after him, but because the forces of Puritanism work themselves out to their logical end in him. In this sense Oliver is a test tube in which Puritanism is born and nurtured, becomes infected with a

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cultivated paganism through contact with people of freer spirit and fewer restraints, comes close to perishing, but finally triumphs by expelling those germs which tempt Oliver to follow his instincts. There are three major crises: Oliver's break through the chains of Puritanism, his return to the fold, and his collapse when unable to adjust himself to the grooves of sheer respectability, each symbolized by some dramatic event or entrance of a new person. Oliver's decomposition is foreshadowed in the conflicts of his family. His father, Peter Alden, despaired of as a wastrel, fulfilled family prophecies by killing a watchman during a fraternity initiation at college. The affair was hushed up and he was bundled off to a series of foreign travels which he carried on as a form of dope for the rest of his life, interrupted only by the formality of inheriting several million dollars, marrying an ambitious self-righteous prig, and permitting himself to become the father of Oliver. Oliver's early education in manners, restraints, and the virtues of self-denial is supervised by his mother, the full-bosomed conscience of the household. A regimen of athletics rounded out Oliver into a pinched Spartan of the mind and the body.

Early schooldays made Oliver envious of the freedoms in conversation and dress of his poorer classmates, and he would secretly try to imitate them. Athletics became a duty, and he served as captain of the football team. All this time the influence of his father, with his philosophy of resignation, his search for experience, his roaming, his excursions among artistic imaginations, his contempt for the amenities of the household grew upon Oliver. His father and mother were wrestling for his soul. The issue was decided by Oliver's meeting Jim Darnley, a young sailor in charge of Peter's yacht. They go swimming, and for the first time Oliver undresses before another person. In Jim, Oliver sees the freedom of the natural man unhampered by any morality or any fixed patterns of living, abandoning himself to the joy of the senses and the innate curiosity of the mind.

Here Oliver's pagan phase begins. He travels on the continent; he fosters a bond of sympathy with his father; he meets Mario, his cousin, a young student who dips like a bee into one experience after another; he sees a lot of Jim and his family. But what a tight-lipped paganism! He is attracted to Rose, Jim's sister, makes a youthful engagement with her, and after an inner struggle he seals the engagement with a peck on the lips. Oliver is fascinated by the ease with which Mario's mind traverses ideas and situations, but he is suspicious of Mario's motives. Like a gradually drying stream, his mind trickles over his new experiences, until the barren rocks of his Puritanism stand rigid. His mother's admonitions have slowly helped to freeze his ardor to live. Sensing this, his father kills himself with an overdose of dope in order to release Oliver from all bonds, permitting him to return without regrets to his mother and the respected "useful" life she symbolizes.

Oliver's final phase is his tragic attempt to get back on the tracks from which he has been derailed. Jim and Mario fade from his immediate life, like lost smells which become a little stale each time they are recaptured. Rudderless, he looks for a wife who will become his worldly manager and spiritual guide. Edith a high-spirited busybody, social worker and D. A. R., turns him down; and Rose refuses him because she is in love with Mario. The war comes. Santayana points the final contrast between Oliver and Mario. Mario joins the army, gets wounded. To him the war is an experience to be taken blithely, to bathe in its richness and warmth, like Odysseus adventuring through the ancient world. Oliver has all kinds of moral and personal scruples, but he finally joins. A few days after the armistice, Oliver is killed in an automobile accident. Mario goes off speculating whether to have an affair with Rose. Santayana's picture has been completed, his ideas have run their logical course. He can now discard the models.

I have summarized the story to indicate the way Santayana swings the Puritan-Pagan theme from one end to the other. At bottom these swings have as little basis in psychological development as the seasonal flights of birds. Despite Santayana's assurance that he was recreating the case-history of Oliver Alden, the actual impression the book leaves is that Santayana juggled the events to fit the compartments of his mind. The symbols never emerge from the situations themselves; but like ideal essences they seem to have existed before Santayana has exhibited them in modern dress. Puritanism and paganism battle through the pages like medieval knights for the favor of Oliver. By cutting the historical threads of Puritanism Santayana has arrived at a concept, a quality which simply does not exist today in such an isolated form. The early Puritans developed their philosophy of thrift, virtue, Godliness, and work under the pressures of early pioneering and later small business expansion. Even from the beginning all kinds of traits spawned in the stream of American civilization grew around the original Puritanism until the terms Yankee, American, and Babbitt were hardly distinguishable from "Puritan." Wasn't there a strong tinge of "Puritanism" in Benjamin Franklin's commercial morality?

Starting with the essence of Puritanism Santayana spins Oliver's life like a spider-web outward from the center. Except for a few references to the routine imposed upon the Alden family by its economic and social position, there is little connection between Oliver and the life of the communities in which he moves throughout the book. At Prep-school, on the yacht with Jim, at Harvard, in London—everywhere he goes, Oliver meets forces and people which either bolster or challenge his Puritanism. We feel as though we are witnessing a controlled experiment in a laboratory.

Similarly the *freedom* posed as the antithesis to Puritan aridity floats like an essence through the book. Jim Darnley's unrestricted animal faith seems to exist only on the sea as a sensuous cruise. On land, amidst his illegitimate wife and bastard son, Jim takes on all the *animal vices* of an ambitious rake. Peter Alden takes drugs, travels, and talks about the *heathen* poets—hardly a freedom of the mind and spirit that is either desirable or attainable. And Mario wanders from one physical and intellectual adventure to another without doing or thinking or feeling anything tangible or significant. Although Mario seems to be Santayana's ideal character in the book, he is the most imperfectly realized.

As a result the struggle within Oliver is not between any tangible opposites. Neither his Puritanism nor what I have roughly called *Paganism* is associated with concrete existing ways of living nor with any specific beliefs. A leisured estheticism, with its rootless foliage of sheer sensuousness and free speculation, with its professional scepticism of all traditions and codes, would probably come closest to Santayana's prescription for the good life. But the tragic aimlessness of those characters who seek this way of life suggests that this is as noxious a fiction as Santayana's version of Puritanism. Like the "bohemian" way, Santayana's naturalized Platonism is an inverted Puritanism, just as spiritually exhausting as the original virus to which it is a kind of chemical reaction—with the formula reversed. Santayana's life-preserver turns out to be a pleasure cushion.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS

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An Esthetic of Migration

THE DESTRUCTIVE ELEMENT, *by Stephen Spender. Houghton Mifflin.* $2.00.

If the "destructive element" is a state of despair, of complete unbelief, presupposing a tendency in the artist to seek a haven in the subjective and individualistic, then Stephen Spender is still half way immersed in it. One could quarrel about the complete meaning of his poems, but his criticism, as exemplified in this study of modern writers and beliefs, is sufficiently lucid to preclude uncertainty. In this book, at least in its programmatic part, he releases the predicament of a particular group of writers, in the same way as Eliot released the larger predicament of a whole generation in *The Waste Land.* And in his search for a valid solution he seems nearly as helpless, with this difference: Eliot fell back into the past, while Spender strains toward the future.

In showing that the political-moral subject is the consistent tradition of modern literature—and this he establishes in a series of admirable essays on James, Yeats, Eliot, Lawrence, Owen, and Auden—Spender affirms the significance to writing of political and economic movements and events ("the war, revolutions, the economic crisis"). Nevertheless, his thought flounders badly when approaching the actual present. On the one hand we are told that it may now be possible to discover a system of values that are "objective and social," as real in the world of society as "Nature is real," and that it is necessary to "turn the reader's and writer's attention outwards from himself to the world"; and on the other that the artist "is concerned with a change of heart," not with social systems: this leads him, in his analysis of van der Post's novel, *In A Province,* to a defense of the Christian notion of individual salvation as the basis for revolutionary change. Here Spender's second self altogether surrenders to the conventional idea that consciousness determines social being. Humanity is thus conceived as an abstraction dwelling in each man, rather than as the ensemble of the conditions of society.

Fortunately for the analyst, however, the surrender and its cause are equally transparent. Spender adopts no philosophical and political viewpoint that could explain and predict the direction of those political events that had become so important to him as "subject-matter" (a term revealing in its limitations) as well as furnish him with the impulse and possibility of an intelligent share in their shaping and fulfilment. In point of fact, he makes much of the incompatibility of art with a viewpoint so definitive. This is reiterated until it emerges as the rationale for rejecting Communism in its scientific meaning, while accepting it—quite seriously now—as the heart's desire, if you will, of Stephen Spender. This last is important, for it worries him to think that his book could possibly be construed as a plea for his beliefs (read: desires), and, in his apprehension, he repeatedly warns the reader against such an error. At bottom, it is this subjective conception of Communism that explains the sketching of a liaison between Freud and Marx, as well as the references to it as "an historic act of the will" which makes Communists "reach forward and forcibly impose on the present the visualized, completed social system of the future." Regardless of the moral excellence of such a will, Communism is herewith reduced to a fantasy. It seems to have utterly escaped Spender that the abolition of classes is already implicit in the economic make-up of present-day society: that Communism is a process encompassing both the daily struggle and its future synthesis; that the means employed to attain it, though not of an ultimate character, are also ends; and that the volition involved, while exerting a reciprocal influence, is basically a reflection in consciousness of the immanence of the new social system within the one now existing.

With the progress of Spender's argument, his confusion mounts. Amidst this welter of outworn idealist preconceptions, the most arbitrary notions take on the proportions of sacrosanct truths. If Communism is an act of the will, or subjective desire, whereas literature, conversely, is endowed with the quality of objectivity, then it follows that a Communist esthetic amounts "to an assertion of knowledge the writer does not possess, and which the reader knows he does not possess. . . . For example, to say I am on the side of the proletariat, that I shall fight for their cause, may be just. To say that the proletariat is better than any other class, that the proletarian revolution is the historic destiny of mankind, is to blind myself as an artist. . . . My argument is that as a man of action it may be necessary to assume this knowledge, but that as an artist, it is not only wrong, it is impossible to do so."

What quickfire judgments from one who is warning us against exactly that! If Spender were not thinking in absolutist moral terms, it could not have occurred to him that the conception of the proletariat as the "better" class means anything more than that the proletariat alone is the really revolutionary class. Moreover, why this dichotomy between the individual as citizen and the individual as artist? How does Spender *know* that the revolutionist, whether as artist or man of action, does not actually *know* that the proletarian revolution is an historic necessity? To disprove this conviction he would have to disprove Marx's economics and politics, against which, of course, he is scarcely equipped to bear arms. Hence we are left with the gratuitous assumption that the true artist is somehow assured of a fund of instantaneous knowledge of a special type, and that it is through this superior and *different* knowledge that Spender is prevented from putting any faith in the claims of Marxism. This knowledge, in fact, tells him that certain things cannot possibly be known to him. However, what Spender is really doing here is immolating the objectivity of Marxism on the altar of the objectivity of art. A victim to a contradiction (between art and Marxism) of his own making, he is compelled by the logic of his position to commit the final absurdity of separating a subject from its problems, a theme from its necessary resolution, and experience from its termini and bounds in any given sector of history.

I realize that, in a sense, my argument against Spender's theories has somewhat run ahead of the specific irritant. He is so far from being a theoretician that it takes a good deal of effort on the part of the reviewer to piece together from a diversity of contexts the underlying consistency—it would be truer to say, inconsistency—of attitude, of which the author is but half-aware. And if it seemed necessary to isolate *some* of his ideas and blast them, it is not from a desire to discredit their proponent, but because of the objective danger of such ideas, that, once launched, tend to assume a life of their own. To my mind, what is really fundamental to Spender in this volume is his rejection of introspection and sensibility as ends in themselves, and the stress he puts on the social factor in esthetic relations and on the "moral significance" of the political movements of our time. As against these, much of the rest of the pattern seems but the expression of a conflict of elements, the self-contradictory esthetic of migration from one ideological climate into an-

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other, transient and uncertain. This appears all the more plausible if one realizes to what degree some of his recent poetry contradicts the ambiguity of his critical attitude. In *Vienna,* for example, the seminal energy of the material and the sympathies of the poet are fused into an unequivocal poetic statement of revolutionary import.

However, if we keep in mind the nature of Spender's indecision, we cannot but see how our own sectarian sins come back to plague us. For it should be said that much of Spender's shrinking from the ultimate meaning of Marxism arises from the false interpretations of it transmitted by various populists and vulgarizers, who insist on equating their *very own* village culture with dialectics. Their strident simplifications violate the intrinsic character of art-mediums at so many points that a revolt against the critical system brooking such vulgarizations becomes inevitable. When Spender attributes to Marxism a gross use of literature as propaganda, the denial of a relative autonomy to the artistic imagination, as well as dictatorial precepts as to material, style and imagery, he has merely taken the "leftists" at their word. One may admit Spender's naiveté in quoting Lenin and some obscure sectarian as if both equally represent the Communist position—though Lenin is quoted approvingly and the sectarian with aversion—and still deplore the blight that sectarianism casts on our literary relations. In part at least, many of Spender's vagaries are but the other side of the "leftist" picture. Hence it is a matter of little surprise to read his opinion that "to the perfect Communist literary critic it must be a matter of almost dumbfounded astonishment that a Chinese coolie who is a member of the party, cannot write books far better than the bourgeois propaganda of Shakespeare." Here is the exaggerated, but not altogether unjustified, reaction of a sensitive mind to vulgarized Marxism.

But enough of quarreling. No criticism of this book would be complete without an appreciation of the merit of Spender's analysis of specific writers. If at this stage of his development, the social approach to the literary problems of the immediate present seems at times to confound Spender, it has, paradoxically enough, seemed to have worked in his favor in dissecting creations that cannot be added to, in the sense that they belong to an epoch just completed. And this suggests that in the esthetic of migration Marxism will yet prove the stronger attraction.

In his essay on James, Spender includes an analysis of Joyce that, to my mind, is in some ways the best on the subject. His insight into the weaknesses of Joyce, which the gravity and size of *Ulysses* have tended to obscure for most critics, is of extreme value for a precise definition of what Joyce did achieve. He perceives the dialectic function of wealth in James' world when he says: "Because money has a symbolic value in his work, it has been assumed that a passion for money was a part of James' social snobbery. No doubt he liked the best that Europe could give. . . . However, the fascination of gold in his books is that it is at once the symbol of release from the more servile purposes of the world in which we live, and also supremely the symbol of the damned." The frenzy and transformations of Lawrence, and the way these affected and impaired the bulk of his literary forms, Eliot's place in modern poetry, his "remarkable neglect" of the external world, the dimness of his concept of tradition and its working out as a theology that leads his criticism astray—these are but radii from a sphere of perceptions that is both the fond farewell to an age and its summation. In the light of such careful love, one must believe in Spender's promise "that the whole point of artists adopting a revolutionary position is that their interests may become social, and not anti-social, and that their criticism may help to shape a new society."

PHILIP RAHV

New Poetry

THE IRON LAND, *by Stanley Burnshaw. Centaur Press.* $2.00.

TO MY CONTEMFORARIES, *by Edwin Rolfe. Dynamo.* $1.00.

Both Burnshaw and Rolfe write not merely as contemplative advocates of class consciousness and the final victory of the proletariat, but from the point of view of being themselves participants in the class struggle. Consistently with this outlook, their poems are built on a simpler plan than those of the "metaphysicals" among the younger radical poets—Fearing, Patchen, Rukeyser, etc.—the aim being to communicate an emotion directly rather than to extract one from a landscape or concept-design built for that purpose.

Burnshaw's book, a narrative poem of more than a hundred pages, is devoted to expressing the feeling of slavery and imprisonment that goes with a job in a large factory. Large-scale industry under capitalism imposes upon millions of workers tasks which can have no meaning to them; and a job in a factory, especially to one who is alert to hills, winds, and springtime, is therefore no different from a stretch in jail. Burnshaw's poem is one long moan, arising from the conflict within the spirit between erotic and vernal stimulation and the drab compulsion to punch a timeclock. Sensitive to the changes of the weather, to flowers, and to the earth's influences, Burnshaw is filled with horror and despair by the mechanical demands of industrial routine. His repugnance is, in fact, so complete it goes beyond the special anguishes occasioned by industrial labor under the present system and fastens its accusations to the body of industry itself. His protest is of an anarchistic, rather than a Marxist, order. Freedom appears to him as freedom from the factory:

With such a room for laboring the three
Soon spun the tangled steel into a network
. . . But now having achieved,
The three suddenly saw how eagerness
Had duped them of a chain of hours beneath
The earth's spring weather.

And even of the revolution of the future he dreams in non-industrial images—actually, in what one might call, considering the experience rendered in the rest of the book, anti-industrial images:

Build a world fit for the bloodborn free! . . .
Into the hills, valleys, prairies, everywhere
Your soil holds food and water, your great earth
Infinite strength teeming with golden worlds
Dreamed by the wisest dead!

In short, though Burnshaw's consciousness has, no doubt, carried him past anarchism, his emotions are faithful to the primitive revulsion with which the young, inexperienced worker, especially the white-collar nature-lover of whom he is writing, first experiences the contact of modern industry. This may be due to the fact that his poem was drafted in

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1926-28, when many a writer had more "feelings" with respect to factory life than understanding of its meaning. Burnshaw knows now that the fevered antagonism between factory discipline and the calls of the blood, lead, when uncorrected by Marxist thought, to conceptions of release through sabotage, loitering, and tramp-defeatism, rather than to working-class organization. But to know a thing and to be capable of making it into emotional poetry are two different matters.

It is interesting to observe the degree to which this internal struggle between the image of freedom and the demands of practical life is absent from Rolfe's work. Rolfe, a younger poet, has been active in the radical movement for many years, and his verse, so far as I know, has all been written within the left-wing revolutionary movement. Hence, while it might be meaningless to say that he is less "subjective" than Burnshaw, it cannot be denied that his ego itself is more informed with non-personal reactions. Rolfe, too, is moved by springtime, and the girls, and the idea of being a poet, but apparently he does not conceive of these sentiments as values with which to interpret his experience. The obligation to learn and to correct himself plays a good part in his spontaneous response to events. This causes his feelings to appear at once more modern and more mature than the older writer's:

> *To welcome multitudes—the miracle of deeds*
> *performed in unison—the mind*
> *must first renounce the fiction of the self*
> *and its vainglory.*

Rolfe has overcome the naive delirium of the young man who feels himself alone in the trap of capitalist industry. His poems consist in the main of emotionalizations of objective events and situations. When he returns to the recollection of personal impressions, it is to make a critical reconstruction of past motives on the basis of communist values.

I feel that Rolfe's major problem is that of language, and that the value of his accomplishments in the future will turn on this element. The problem of language is, of course, the technical form of the problem of imagination. Rolfe's poems have the important negative virtue of renouncing the attempt (made by MacLeish, Rukeyser, etc.) to reach a solution by means of metaphysical overtones which are essentially irrelevant to their subjects. He believes sufficiently in the significance of his communist experiences to feel that in themselves they contain the materials of a convincing poetry. Thus his assertions remain simple, decisive, and as direct as he can make them. But what he does too often is to take the stuff which forms the atmosphere of the revolutionary movement in America and to give an emotional rendition of it, without adding anything to the concrete image of the situation already existing in the reader's mind. When he does this, the poem merges in the reader's general awareness of the events dealt with, and neither augments his consciousness of them nor becomes memorable in itself. The results of such radical virtuosity, which contents itself with the use of clichés and flabby language, are editorials keyed with T. S. Eliot-ish despair or hope-in-the-future enthusiasm of a typical species. To overcome this tendency, it is necessary that the words in the poems possess the evocative energy of the workings of an actual experience. In passages like the following, from the poem "Asbestos," describing an un-class-conscious worker, Rolfe's imagination, with its communist training, takes a good hold on the verbal instruments of modern poetry:

> *John's deathbed is a curious affair:*
> *the posts are made of bone, the spring of nerves,*
> *the mattress bleeding flesh. Infinite air,*
> *compressed from dizzy altitudes, now serves*
>
> *his skullface as a pillow. Overhead*
> *a vulture leers in solemn mockery,*
> *knowing what John had never known: that dead*
> *workers are dead before they cease to be.*

HAROLD ROSENBERG

A Night Letter on William Saroyan*

NL56 COLLECT NEW YORK NY 8 540P
EDITORS PARTISAN REVIEW
430 SIXTH AVENUE

GENTLEMEN SAROYAN STILL BEST SYNTHETIC GENIUS ON THE MARKET AS GOOD AS NATHALIA CRANE AND BETTER THAN THE OTHER CHILD PRODIGY THOMAS WOLFE BUT I CANT REVIEW INHALE AND EXHALE IT GETS ME HERE AND TO HELL WITH SAROYANS UNHAPPY CHILDHOOD LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT MY OWN SOME DAY OK SKIP IT NERVES ALL SHOT AFTER TOURING THE GLOBE WITH SAROYAN HOLD ON TO YOUR HAT LETS GO STOP FROM NEW YORK QUOTE OF COURSE THERE IS NOTHING ANYONE CAN DO AND NOT MUCH OF A REASON WHY ANYONE SHOULD EVEN WANT TO DO ANYTHING BECAUSE EVEN IF YOU THROW AWAY YOUR ROLLER SKATES AND SELL YOUR CAR AND REFUSE TO GO ANYWHERE EVERY MORNING THE SUN RISETH AND EVERY EVENING IT GOES DOWN AND ONE SEASON FOLLOWS ANOTHER AND NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO OR DO NOT DO THE ANSWER WILL BE MUCH THE SAME UNQUOTE DESPATCH FROM THE NORTH ATLANTIC OCEAN QUOTE IT IS ONLY A BODY OF WATER IT IS ONLY THE ATLANTIC AND I WENT DOWN TO MY CABIN AND CLOSED THE DOOR AND SAID I AM ON A SHIP CROSSING THE OCEAN MOVING IN A VESSEL FROM NORTH AMERICA TO EUROPE THATS ALL UNQUOTE FROM LEMBERG QUOTE AND THE PEOPLE WALK IN THE STREETS THEIR FACES ARE THE FACES OF NOTHING ALL THEIR FACES ARE NOTHING IT IS GOD SLEEPING A BAD DREAM IN ALL THEIR FACES IS ONLY ONE THING EMPTINESS UNQUOTE SUSPENSE MOUNTS IN KIEV QUOTE WHAT THE HELL HUMAN BEINGS ARE HUMAN BEINGS AND YOU CAN CALL THEM ANYTHING YOU LIKE AND THEY CAN CALL THEMSELVES ANYTHING THEY LIKE BUT THEY ARE THE SAME ANYWHERE ANYTIME UNQUOTE STARK DRAMA IN KHARKOV QUOTE TELL HIM YES I SAID TO THE JEWISH GIRL TELL HIM IT IS THE SAME EVERYWHERE TELL HIM IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT CAPITALIST FASCIST OR PROLETARIAN IT IS THE SAME EVERYWHERE UNQUOTE WITH THE GREAT TRUTH SEEKER IN THE FRONT LINE TRENCHES OF MOSCOW AND KIEV QUOTE THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD CHANGES EVERY MINUTE OF COURSE IT IS WEDNESDAY FOR EXAMPLE THEN THURSDAY THEN FRIDAY THEN SATURDAY AND EVERY DAY THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD CHANGES UNQUOTE HE CAN ALSO COUNT UP TO A HUNDRED BELIEVE IT OR NOT AND WE ARE NOW IN HELSINGFORS QUOTE LAST YEAR IN ENGLAND THE KING LISTENED AND KNEW THE TRUTH AND TOMORROW IN NEBRASKA A CHILD WILL LISTEN AND

* *Inhale and Exhale, by William Saroyan. Random House.* $2.50.

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KNOW THE TRUTH AND IT WILL BE THE SAME WITH KINGS AND CHILDREN A HUNDRED YEARS FROM NOW OR A THOUSAND UNQUOTE HOME AGAIN THANK GOD IN NEW YORK QUOTE THERE IS NO ARMENIA GENTLEMEN THERE IS NO AMERICA AND THERE IS NO ENGLAND AND NO FRANCE AND NO ITALY THERE IS ONLY THE EARTH GENTLEMEN UNQUOTE SO YOU CAN SEE FOR YOURSELF THAT IF TRAVEL BROADENS IT ALSO FLATTENS ONE STOP AND ITS TOO BAD BECAUSE YOU KEEP THINKING IT MIGHT SOMEHOW SOME DAY ADD UP TO MORE THAN ZERO STOP ARE YOU SURE DONT WANT TO HEAR ABOUT MY UNHAPPY CHILDHOOD STOP OK SETTING SAIL WILL SEND YOU TREMENDOUS ARTICLE ALL ABOUT IT STOP BUT IF YOU WOULD ONLY RECONSIDER ABOUT THE UNHAPPY CHILDHOOD

KENNETH FEARING

A Tale of Folk Courage

BLACK THUNDER, *by Arna Bontemps. Macmillan.* $2.50.

In that limited and almost barren field known as the Negro novel, Arna Bontemps's *Black Thunder* fills a yawning gap and fills it competently. Covering all those skimpy reaches of Negro letters I know, this is the only novel dealing forthrightly with the historical and revolutionary traditions of the Negro people.

Black Thunder is the true story of a slave insurrection that failed. But in his telling of the story of that failure Bontemps manages to reveal and dramatize through the character of his protagonist, Gabriel, a quality of folk courage unparalleled in the proletarian literature of this country. Gabriel is a young slave, who, hearing of the struggles of the French proletariat and the exploits of L'Ouverture, decides to avenge the murder of a fellow-slave by leading the Negroes of Richmond, Virginia, against the landowners. On the night when the attack is to take place, Gabriel's ragged slave-host, armed with cutlasses, pikes, and a "peck of bullets," hides in the woods near Richmond, waiting for the call to advance and capture the arsenal. At the crucial moment, a terrific rainstorm sweeps down, flooding the fields and bogging the roads. This, coupled with the treachery of two members of his band, makes the uprising impossible. Gabriel's army deserts him. The next three weeks are times of wild terror, for everywhere the white plantation owners are asking one another, "What Negro can you point to and say definitely he is not involved?"

From that juncture onward, *Black Thunder* is mainly the story of Gabriel, who believes in the eventual triumph of his destiny in spite of all the forces which conspire against it. He is convinced that God and the universe are on his side. He believes he must and will lead the Negro people to freedom. He seems to have no personal fear and no personal courage. He thinks, dreams, and feels wholly in terms of Negro liberation. His mind is a confused mixture of superstition, naive cunning, idealism, and a high courage born partly of his deep ignorance and partly of an amazing ability to forget his personal safety. He contemptuously refuses to run to the mountains to save himself and decides to stay near the scene of the insurrection "to get in two-three mo' good licks fo' my time comes." When considering Gabriel solely as an isolated individual, he seems sustained by an extremely foolish belief in himself; but when one remembers his slave state, when one realizes the extent to which he has made the wrongs of his people his wrongs, and the degree in which he has submerged his hopes in their hopes—when one remembers this, he appears logically and gloriously invincible.

The plan for the uprising is so simple and daring that when it is disclosed and tracked to its source, the fear-ridden whites can scarcely believe it. But Gabriel believes, he believes even when he is caught; even when the black cowl is capped about his head, even when the ax swings, he believes. Why?

For me the cardinal value of Bontemps's book, besides the fact that it is a thumping story well told, lies in the answer to that question. Perhaps I am straying further afield than the author did in search for an answer. If I do, it is because I believe we have in *Black Thunder* a revelation of the very origin and source of folk values in literature.

Even though Gabriel's character is revealed in terms of personal action and dialogue, I feel there is in him much more than mere personal dignity and personal courage. There is in his attitude something which transcends the limits of immediate consciousness. He is buoyed in his hope and courage by an optimism which takes no account of the appalling difficulties confronting him. He hopes when there are no objective reasons or grounds for hope; he fights when his fellow-slaves scamper for their lives. In doing so, he takes his place in that gallery of fictitious characters who exist on the plane of the ridiculous and the sublime. Bontemps endows Gabriel with a myth-like and deathless quality. And it is in this sense, I believe, that *Black Thunder* sounds a new note in Negro fiction, thereby definitely extending the boundaries and ideology of the Negro novel.

RICHARD WRIGHT

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